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The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany

By Sheila Faith Weiss*

THE HISTORIES of all national eugenics movements raise difficult and controversial questions, but the case of German eugenics or "race hygiene" (*Rassenhygiene*) is by far the most troubling.¹ For many people the term *German eugenics* immediately brings to mind visions of the Nazi death camps and the "final solution." This presumed connection between German eugenics and the racial policies of the Third Reich makes a sophisticated analysis of German eugenics especially urgent, and especially problematic. Although much progress has been made in recent years toward correcting the tendency simply to subordinate race hygiene to the larger themes of either the history of European racism or the development of *völkisch* thought, the current historiography of German eugenics is far from satisfactory.²

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¹ The German term *Rassenhygiene* (race hygiene) had a broader scope than the English word *eugenics*. It included not only all attempts aimed at "improving" the hereditary quality of a population but also measures directed toward an absolute increase in population. Despite these differences I will employ the two terms interchangeably throughout the essay. Even when German eugenicists limited themselves to measures that fall under the more limited term *Eugenik* (the Germanized form of the English word), they almost always used the term *Rassenhygiene*.

² For examples of this tendency to view German eugenics as part of a "larger story" of either the history of European racism or *völkisch* thought see David Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism and the German Monist League* (New York: American Elsevier, 1971); Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. E. Howard (New York: New American Library, 1977); and George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (London: J. M. Dent, 1978). More recently West German historians have begun to treat eugenics as a subject worthy of study in its own right. See, e.g., Gunter Mann, "Rassenhygiene—Sozialdarwinismus," in *Biologismus im 19. Jahrhundert in Deutschland*, ed. Mann (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1973), pp. 73–93; Werner Doecke, *Alfred Ploetz (1860–1940): Sozialdarwinist und Gesellschaftsbiologe*, med. Diss., Frankfurt, 1975 (Tübingen: privately printed, 1975); Renate Rissom, *Fritz Lenz und die Rassenhygiene*, med. Diss., Mainz, 1982 (Husum: Matthiesen, 1983); and Georg Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im dritten Reich: Krise und Wende," *Medizinhistorische Journal*, 1979, 14:114–133. During the past few years there have been several excellent studies on specific eugenic practices and institutions. See Gerhard Baader and Ulrich Schultz, eds., *Medizin und Nationalsozialismus: Tabuisierte Vergangenheit—Ungebrochene Tradition?* (Dokumentation des Gesundheitstages Berlin 1980, 1) (West Berlin: Verlagsgesellschaft Gesundheit, 1980); Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation und Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Schriften des Zentralinstituts für sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung der Freien Universität Berlin, 48) (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); Georg Lilienthal, *Der "Lebensborn e.V.": Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* (Forschungen zur neueren Medizin- und Biologiegeschichte, 1) (Stuttgart/New York: Gustav Fischer, 1985); Benno Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft: Die Aussonderung von Juden, Zigeunern und Geisteskranken 1933–1945* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984); and Paul Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Social Context," *Annals of Science*, 1985, 42:303–318. Despite this new research, many topics have yet to be investigated.

Looking only at developments during the Third Reich, it would be easy to come to the false conclusion that race hygiene was always a right-wing movement. German eugenics, however, was far more heterogeneous in its politics and ideology than is generally assumed. Although its advocates were overwhelmingly recruited from the ranks of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated middle classes), they embraced no single political outlook. Until Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 precluded the expression of political diversity within the movement, German eugenics captured the interest of individuals whose allegiance spanned the breadth of the Wilhelmine and Weimar political spectrum. While there were few committed Communists associated with the movement, the important position played by the socialist Alfred Grotjahn and the large number of members affiliated with the Weimar left-center eugenics society, the *Deutscher Bund für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde* (German Alliance for National Regeneration and the Study of Heredity), render it impossible to view German race hygiene as solely or even primarily a right-wing phenomenon. About the only unanimity discernible between such men as Grotjahn and the political conservative Fritz Lenz was on the question of laissez-faire capitalism: like the vast majority of other German race hygienists, both men viewed it as dysgenic. Their consistent critique of capitalism should make us suspicious of interpretations that see race hygiene as just another intellectual prop of corporate capital.³

Just as German eugenicists varied greatly in their political orientation, they differed in the degree to which they accepted and promoted racist ideologies. Like the great majority of educated whites in Europe and North America of their day, all race hygienists accepted the racial and cultural superiority of Caucasians as a matter of course. From today's vantage point all German eugenicists would be considered racist; however, since this type of racism was shared by most eugenicists everywhere, emphasizing it in the case of Germany, where the population was relatively homogeneous, tells us very little. The situation is more complicated with regard to ideologies of Aryan or Nordic supremacy. It is undeniable that many race hygienists, including several in the vanguard of the movement such as Alfred Ploetz (1860–1940), Max von Gruber (1853–1927), Ernst Rüdin (1874–1952), and Fritz Lenz (1887–1976), were Aryan enthusiasts. Indeed, among the prominent Aryan-minded eugenicists there were those who were—sometimes secretly, sometimes openly—in favor of using race hygiene to promote the so-called Nordic race. However, extreme caution must be taken not to equate the pro-Aryan sentiments of a handful of German eugenicists with the aims of the movement as a whole. Many of Germany's leading eugenicists, such as Wilhelm Schallmayer (1857–1919), Hermann Muckermann (1877–1962), Artur Ostermann (1876–?), and Alfred Grotjahn (1869–1931), were uncompromising in their critique of Aryan ideologies. Together with large segments of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene* (German Society for Race Hygiene), and virtually all of the members of the *Deutscher Bund*, they rejected out of hand the desirability of a "Nordic race hygiene." In addition, anyone who examines the content of the two major Wilhelmine and Weimar eugenics journals and looks at

³ This point is clearly presented in Loren Graham's insightful article "Science and Values: The Eugenics Movement in Germany and Russia in the 1920's," *American Historical Review*, 1977, 82:1133–1164, rpt. in Graham, *Between Science and Values* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 217–256.

the platform of the Deutsche Gesellschaft will be struck by the relative lack of space devoted to *völkisch* ideologies or "Nordic eugenics" compared with other issues. On the whole this is true even of the writings of those eugenicists who embraced the Aryan mystique.

What both Aryan apologists and those eugenicists rejecting Aryanism *did* stress were strategies designed to increase the number of Germany's "fitter" elements and eliminate the army of the "unfit"—fitness being defined in terms of social and cultural productivity. The eugenicists' equation of fitness with productivity and achievement, and of degeneracy with asocial behavior and the inability to contribute to society, reflected their own middle-class prejudices. In sum, then, German eugenics before (and to some extent even after) 1933 was not primarily concerned with replenishing and improving the Nordic stock of Europe; occasional public displays of pro-Aryan sentiment notwithstanding, *Rassenhygiene* was more preoccupied with class than with race. Prior to Hitler's seizure of power the concerns of German race hygiene were not fundamentally different from those of many other Western eugenics movements.

Despite this unity of class bias, the diversity of political outlooks and racial attitudes among German eugenicists would appear to preclude their having had any single goal in common. At first glance it is easy to see differences and conflicts of interest—so much so that it is tempting to try to divide the movement into right-wing racist and left-wing nonracist camps as a first attempt at organizational clarity. While the institutional development of Weimar race hygiene, to be discussed later in this essay, does offer some justification for this general classification, the story is more complex. Viewing the movement as an uneasy union of two separate and competing "camps" obscures the underlying rationale and logic of German eugenics. Whatever additional reasons may have motivated them, all German race hygienists embraced eugenics as a means to create a healthier, more productive, and hence more powerful nation. Race hygiene was, however, quite unlike the usual political and economic strategies designed by those in power for the same purpose. Eugenics embodied a technocratic, managerial logic—the idea that *power* was a product of the rational management of *population*. For its practitioners race hygiene was a sometimes conscious, often unconscious strategy to buttress the supposedly declining cultural and political hegemony of Germany and the West through the rational management and control of the reproductive capacities of various groups and classes. Such a rational administration of human resources, the eugenicists believed, would ensure the level of hereditary fitness thought necessary for the long-term survival of Germany and Western Europe and the allegedly superior cultural traditions they embodied. This logic constituted the common bond that united all German eugenicists.

THE ORIGINS OF GERMAN EUGENICS, 1890–1903

Social, Professional, and Intellectual Contexts

German eugenics cannot be understood without examining the conjunction of circumstances that collectively account for its origin as a movement. Three contexts stand out as being particularly significant in shaping the early development of race hygiene: the *social* problems resulting from Germany's rapid and thoroughgoing industrialization; the *professional* traditions of the German medical

community; and the *intellectual* currency of the "selectionist" variant of social Darwinism then fashionable among certain German biologists and self-styled social theorists. These three contexts will be dealt with in turn.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the newly unified German Empire was transformed from an agricultural into an industrial society. The industrialization and urbanization process, expeditious and thorough as it was, produced profound changes in the social and economic structure of the young Reich, engendering a myriad of serious social tensions and problems.⁴ Had Imperial Germany not possessed a rigidly authoritarian political structure shaped primarily by the self-interest of preindustrial elites and their allies in heavy industry, the social dislocations precipitated by industrialization would not have appeared so threatening to the stability of the state and the social order. But the *Kaiserreich* was certainly no democracy, and, given the stranglehold that the landed aristocracy, the military, the barons of industry, and high-ranking members of the bureaucracy had on politics, these tensions and problems could not be effectively remedied.⁵

Foremost among the problems afflicting the Reich as a result of this combination of political immobility and rapid social change was the rise of a radical labor movement. The growing number of strikes, lockouts, and other forms of labor unrest, coupled with the growing success of the officially Marxist Social Democratic Party at the polls, provoked fear and anxiety among many middle- and upper-class Germans regarding the seemingly hostile, uncontrollable, and ever-increasing industrial proletariat.⁶ In addition, there were other social problems that were viewed by Germany's *Bildungsbürgertum* as posing a threat to the proper functioning of the state. These included an increase in various types of criminal activity; a rise in prostitution, suicides, alcohol consumption, and alcoholism; and a heightened awareness of the existence of large numbers of insane and feeble-minded individuals. This latter group, the so-called mental defectives, was singled out by both medical and lay observers as an especially grave social and financial liability for the new Reich.⁷

⁴ Walther G. Hoffmann, "The Take-Off in Germany," in *The Economics of Take-Off into Sustained Growth*, ed. W. W. Rostow (London: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 95–118; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 24, 41–59; and Wolfgang Köllmann, "The Process of Urbanization in Germany at the Height of the Industrialization Period," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1969, 4:59–72, on p. 62.

⁵ For a discussion of this issue see Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, pp. 60–140; Richard J. Evans, ed., *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), pp. 16–22; and Wolfgang Mock, "Manipulation von oben oder Selbstorganisation an der Basis? Einige neuere Ansätze in der englischen Historiographie zur Geschichte des deutschen Kaiserreichs," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1981, 232:358–375.

⁶ For a brief discussion of the middle-class fear of the proletariat see Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), p. 129; Fritz Stern, "The Political Consequences of the Unpolitical German," in *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1975), p. 15; and Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany* (1963; New York: Arno Press, 1979), pp. 85–101.

⁷ See Vincent E. McHale and Eric A. Johnson, "Urbanization, Industrialization and Crime in Imperial Germany," *Social Science History*, 1976–1977, 1:45–78, 210–247, on pp. 212–214; Eduard O. Mönkemöller, "Kriminalität," in *Handwörterbuch der sozialen Hygiene*, ed. Alfred Grotjahn and J. Kaup (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1912), Vol. I, pp. 687–688; Mönkemöller, "Selbstmord," *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 376; E. Fuld, "Das rückfälliger Verbrechertum," *Deutsche Zeit- und Streit-Fragen*, 1885, 14:453–484; Richard Evans, "Prostitution, State and Society in Imperial Germany," *Past and Present*, 1976, No. 70, pp. 106–129, on pp. 106–108; James S. Roberts, "Der Alkoholkonsum

These problems were hotly debated by many of Germany's academic social scientists and reform-minded religious leaders under the rubric of the *soziale Frage*—a term referring to the social and political consequences of unbridled economic liberalism and the industrialization process.⁸ Although those discussing the “social question” embraced different economic and political ideals, all agreed that some kind of *Sozialpolitik* (social policy) was necessary to integrate Germany's proletariat (and asocial subproletariat) into the Reich, thereby preventing the collapse of the state. Like most educated middle-class Germans, the early eugenicists were keenly aware of this debate and were fully cognizant of the serious social problems that plagued the Reich as a result of the industrial revolution.⁹ The increased visibility of a number of asocial, nonproductive types—an important component of the much-debated “social question”—was the problem they set out to tackle using a new form of *Sozialpolitik*: race hygiene.

That these race hygienists would be inclined to offer a biomedical solution for social and political problems can be attributed to the second major influence that shaped their eugenics: the distinctive social, political, and intellectual traditions of the German medical community. All of the movement's important leaders were physicians by training and had studied medicine before turning their attention to eugenics. Moreover, fully a third of those affiliated with the Deutsche Gesellschaft during its early years were medically trained. As physicians, the founders of German eugenics not only shared the prejudices and posture of the *Bildungsbürgertum* as a whole, but were also heir to a well-defined set of assumptions about the hereditary nature of disease and the role of medical professionals in safeguarding the health of the nation.

The medical professionals' perception of themselves as custodians of national health, and hence of national wealth and efficiency, has a long history. In Germany it dates at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, when German physicians demonstrated their responsibility to the state during the so-called health reform movement.¹⁰ Later, during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the rise of scientific medicine and hygiene bestowed upon academic physicians, and medical professionals in general, an unprecedented level of social

deutscher Arbeiter im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 1980, 6:220–242, on pp. 226, 232, 237; Alfred Grotjahn, “Alkoholismus,” in *Handwörterbuch der sozialen Hygiene*, Vol. I, p. 14; Grotjahn, “Krankenhauswesen,” *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 643; Ludwig Meyer, “Die Zunahme der Geisteskranken,” *Deutsche Rundschau*, 1885, p. 83; Alexander von Oettingen, *Die Moralstatistik in ihrer Bedeutung für eine Sozialethik* (3rd ed., Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1882), p. 671; and Arthur von Fircks, *Bevölkerung und Bevölkerungspolitik* (Leipzig: C. L. Hirschfeld, 1898), p. 116.

⁸ Albert Müssigang, *Die soziale Frage in historischen Schule der deutschen Nationalökonomie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), p. 4; Adolf Wagner, *Rede über die soziale Frage* (Berlin: Wiegandt & Grieben, 1872); Gustav Schmoller, “Die soziale Frage und der preussische Staat,” in *Quellen zur Geschichte der sozialen Frage in Deutschland*, ed. Ernst Schraepler (2nd ed., Göttingen: Muster-schmidt, 1964), Vol. II, pp. 62–66; Friedrich Naumann, “Christlich-Sozial,” *ibid.*, pp. 79–84; Ringer, *Decline of the German Mandarins* (cit. n. 6), pp. 145–147.

⁹ For a discussion of the attitudes and prejudices of the *Bildungsbürgertum* see Klaus Vondung, ed., *Das Wilhelminische Bildungsbürgertum: Zur Sozialgeschichte seiner Ideen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976); and Stern, “Political Consequences of the Unpolitical German” (cit. n. 6), *passim*.

¹⁰ Erwin H. Ackerknecht, “Beiträge zur Geschichte der Medizinalreform von 1848,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin*, 1932, 25:61–109, 112–183; and George Rosen, “Die Entwicklung der sozialen Medizin,” in *Seminar: Medizin, Gesellschaft, Geschichte*, ed. H.-U. Deppe and M. Regus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 99–102.

esteem and, indirectly, political importance.¹¹ At this time many young medical professionals eager to make a contribution to national health turned their attention to bacteriology; others, like some of Germany's future eugenicists, adopted a different approach. Their exposure to fields of medicine that emphasized the role of heredity in the etiology of disease (e.g., neurology and psychiatry) led them to question the efficacy of concentrating solely on pathogens. Instead, they were convinced that serious disorders such as mental illness, feeble-mindedness, criminality, epilepsy, hysteria, and the tendency to tuberculosis were often inherited and could quite frequently be traced back to a "hereditary diseased constitution."¹² Many medically trained race hygienists argued that the surest way to improve the general level of national health was to upgrade the bodily constitution of all individuals in society—a task to be accomplished by means of an energetic eugenics program.

In addition to the social question and the German medical tradition there was a third influence that greatly shaped the early development of the movement: the "selectionist" variety of social Darwinism popularized by Germany's most outspoken biologist, Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), and later legitimated by the scientific writings of the Freiburg embryologist August Weismann (1834–1914).

Haeckel went far beyond Darwin in his attempt to flesh out the larger philosophical and social meaning of the evolutionary theory. Although, like Darwin, he believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, Haeckel always stressed Darwin's selection principle as the most important engine of forward-directed organic change; indeed, for Haeckel, Darwinism was synonymous with selection.¹³ Weismann, who came to reject the possibility of the inheritance of acquired characteristics through his work on heredity, afforded Darwin's principle of natural selection an even greater role in organic and social evolution than did the author of the *Origin of Species* himself. His famous mechanism of heredity, "the continuity of the germ plasm," first articulated in 1883, challenged the basic tenets of the more optimistic first-generation social Darwinists who assumed that new characteristics acquired by an organism as a result of environmental change would be transmitted to future generations.¹⁴ As one German social Darwinist and eugenicist expressed it,

¹¹ George Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (New York: M.D. Publications, 1958), p. 44; Eduard Seidler, "Der politische Standort des Arztes im zweiten Kaiserreich," in *Medizin, Naturwissenschaft, Technik und das zweite Kaiserreich*, ed. Gunter Mann and Rolf Winau (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 91–92; and Hans-Heinz Eulner, "Hygiene als akademisches Fach," in *Städte-, Wohnungs- und Kleidungs-hygiene des 19. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, ed. Walter Artelt et al. (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1969), p. 18.

¹² Erwin H. Ackerknecht, *A Short History of Psychiatry*, 2nd ed., trans. S. Wolff (New York/London: Hafner, 1968), p. 82; K. Grassman, "Kritische Ueberblick über die gegenwärtige Lehre von der Erbllichkeit der Psychosen," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie*, 1896, 52:960–1022; Oscar Aronson, *Ueber Heredität bei Epilepsie* (Berlin: Wilhelm Axt, 1894); M. Wahl, "Über den gegenwärtigen Stand der Erbllichkeitsfrage in der Lehre von der Tuberculose," *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 1885, No. 1, pp. 3–5, No. 3, pp. 36–38, No. 4, pp. 34–36, No. 5, pp. 69–71, No. 6, pp. 88–90; and "Über die Vererbung von Geisteskrankheiten nach Beobachtung in preussischen Irrenanstalten," *Jahrbuch für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*, 1879, 1:65–66.

¹³ Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation*, trans. and rev. by E. Ray Lankester (London: Henry S. King, 1876), Vol. I, p. 120.

¹⁴ August Weismann, "On Heredity," in *Essays on Heredity and Kindred Problems*, ed. Edward Poulton, Selmar Schönland, and Arthur Shipley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889); and Frederick Churchill, "August Weismann and a Break from Tradition," *Journal of the History of Biology*, 1968, 1:91–112.

It was Weismann's teaching regarding the separation of the germ plasm from the soma, the hereditary stuff from the body of the individual, that first allowed us to recognize the importance of Darwin's principle of selection. Only then did we comprehend that it is impossible to improve our progeny's condition by means of physical and mental training. Apart from the direct manipulation of the nucleus, only selection can preserve and improve the race.¹⁵

Indeed, for those who accepted Weismann's views with respect to both heredity and the "all-supremacy" of selection, eugenics was the only practical strategy to ensure racial progress and avert racial decline.

If the ideas of Haeckel and Weismann encouraged many contemporaries to view natural selection as the sole agent of all organic and social progress, the writings of the two biologists also emphasized that progress was not inevitable. Under certain conditions the "unfit" might prosper, thereby posing a challenge to further evolutionary development. This "selectionist" perspective and language provided Germany's future eugenicists with novel tools of analysis that enabled them to come to grips with the social question by transforming it into a scientific problem: the asocial individuals created by industrialization became for them the biologically and medically unfit. The only way to eliminate this group from the population was through a policy of "rational selection," or race hygiene.

The significance of the three contexts is nowhere more clearly visible than in the intellectual backgrounds and early writings of Alfred Ploetz and Wilhelm Schallmayer. Working largely independently of one another during the prehistory of the movement (1890–1903), both men laid the foundations for the future course of race hygiene in their country. Ploetz's organizational talents and charismatic personality allowed him to create the institutional basis for the young movement almost single-handedly. Schallmayer's treatises on eugenics defined the significant theoretical and practical problems that would occupy German eugenicists for decades.

Alfred Ploetz

Ploetz was born in 1860 into an upper-middle-class family in Swinemünde on the Baltic Sea. Although details of his early life remain sketchy, he had become acquainted with the works of Darwin and Haeckel while still at the *Gymnasium*. Even before he began to study economics at the University of Breslau in 1884, he developed a strong interest in the *soziale Frage*; during his student days at Breslau he became increasingly sympathetic to some forms of socialism. Indeed, he transferred to Zurich in 1885 in order to become better acquainted with the various brands of socialist theory. There he not only attended lectures on socialism but became personally acquainted with August Bebel, the leader of the German Social Democratic Party, and other socialists in exile from Bismarck's oppressive Anti-Socialist Law.¹⁶

Ploetz's interest in economic theory, particularly socialism, was not merely

¹⁵ Hermann W. Siemens, *Die biologischen Grundlagen der Rassenhygiene und der Bevölkerungs-politik* (Munich: J. G. Lehmann, 1917), p. 10. This and all translations are my own.

¹⁶ Doebele, *Alfred Ploetz* (cit. n. 2), pp. 4, 18; and Hermann Muckermann, "Alfred Ploetz und sein Werk," *Eugenik, Erblehre, Erbpflanze*, 1931, 1:261.

theoretical: he was determined to establish a kind of pan-Germanic utopian commune. As he stated in his memoirs, the popular novels of Felix Dahn, professor of early German history, as well as works of other enthusiasts of Germany's Teutonic past, awakened his interest in the Germanic race. Indeed, Ploetz became so obsessed with the glories of the old Teutonic tribes that he and several friends took an oath under an oak tree to do everything in their power to elevate the Germanic race to the level it had allegedly attained a thousand years earlier. Thanks to this passionate concern, he chose to study economics rather than his first love, biology, believing it would prove to be more useful in helping him accomplish his goal. While at the University of Breslau, Ploetz and a small circle of friends—including the writers Carl and Gerhart Hauptmann—formed a society with the expressed intention of establishing a colony or socialist cooperative in a country where a large part of the population was of Germanic stock. The American Pacific Northwest was chosen as the best possible site.¹⁷

Ploetz traveled to the United States to familiarize himself with the social and economic conditions of the region and to experience, at first hand, life in one of the already established utopian socialist colonies. He spent six months in Iowa living and working in the cooperative known as Icarus. Appalled at the amount of fighting, laziness, egotism, and infidelity he observed in a community whose economic organization was supposed to eradicate such behavior, Ploetz came to an unusual conclusion: "The unity of such colonies, especially those offering a large amount of individual freedom, cannot be maintained owing to the average [quality] of human material at present. . . . I came to the conclusion that the plans we wished to execute would be destroyed as a result of the [low] *quality of human beings*." His reaction to this revelation was no less surprising: "For this reason I must direct my efforts *not merely toward preserving the race but also toward improving it*. . . . My views . . . immediately led me to the field of medicine—which appeared to be relevant to the biological transformation of human beings."¹⁸

After his six-month stay in the United States, Ploetz returned to Zurich to begin his medical studies; later, under the direction of the psychiatrist and future eugenicist August Forel, he began an internship in a Swiss mental hospital. Although he had harbored certain proeugenic sentiments even before he began his medical training, Ploetz moved a step closer to articulating the need for race hygiene as a result of it. His experiences in the psychiatric hospital acquainted him with the so-called mental defectives and focused his attention on one cause of the problem: alcoholism. Largely as a result of his discussions with Forel on the subject of alcohol and heredity, Ploetz took an oath of abstinence. From that point on, the counterselective effects of alcohol consumption became one of his major eugenic concerns.¹⁹

After taking specialized medical courses in Paris in 1890, Ploetz returned to the United States and opened a medical practice in Springfield, Massachusetts. However, he found this work very disappointing. In addition to resenting the time it took from his study of eugenic problems, Ploetz was dismayed by the limitations of therapeutic medicine. Having read Haeckel, he could not have

¹⁷ Muckermann, "Ploetz und sein Werk," p. 261; and Doecke, *Alfred Ploetz*, pp. 5, 6.

¹⁸ Doecke, *Alfred Ploetz*, p. 13; emphasis in original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

overlooked the attack on medical science in his popular work, *The History of Creation*. By this time Ploetz had recognized the need for a separate discipline dedicated to the hereditary improvement of the race—a discipline more effective in eliminating disease than the thankless “Sisyphean labor” carried out by modern therapeutic medicine.²⁰

Influenced by this constellation of social, professional, and intellectual contexts, Ploetz completed *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse und der Schutz der Schwachen* (The fitness of our race and the protection of the weak) in 1895.²¹ Although initially his book did not generate much public interest, it raised the broad biological, social, and ethical problems that created the need for race hygiene in the first place. It also revealed the technocratic logic underlying eugenic thought.

The major thrust of Ploetz’s argument recalls Darwin’s personal dilemma in the *Descent of Man*: How can human beings reconcile the inevitable conflict between the humanitarian ideals and practices of the noblest part of our nature with the interest of the race, whose biological efficiency is allegedly impaired by those very ideals and practices? Translated into concrete economic and political terms, Ploetz viewed the problem as follows: Should the state continue to expand the social net and regulate various aspects of economic life in order to lessen the hardship of the weak and economically underprivileged, at the risk of undermining the overall biological fitness of its citizens? Would not health, accident, and old-age insurance invariably lead to an increase in the number of unfit, perhaps at the expense of the fittest members of society?²²

Ploetz was not oblivious to the serious moral and social issues raised by this alleged conflict. As important as preventing *Entartung* (degeneration) was for him, Ploetz did not believe in ignoring the needs of the present generation; the danger of *Entartung* was not a signal for Germany to abandon health and welfare legislation, despite its counterselective effects. Nor did it mean that one must embrace capitalism, the seemingly most “proselective” economic system, and relinquish all hope of creating a humane, socialist society. The solution to these pressing conflicts was the substitution of a humane and scientific policy of “rational selection” for the inhumane and inefficient process of natural selection. Unlike the existing personal hygiene movement, with its concern for the health of the individual, the new hygiene would direct its attention to improving the hereditary fitness of the human race. Ploetz named it *Rassenhygiene*.²³

Considering Ploetz’s own enthusiasm for all things Teutonic and the heated controversy that later ensued over the use of the word *Rassenhygiene* as a synonym for *eugenics*, it is worth examining what he meant by the term. His definition of *Rasse* is ambiguous and difficult to translate into English: “einer durch Generationen lebenden Gesamtheit von Menschen in Hinblick auf ihre körperlichen und geistigen Eigenschaften.” Roughly speaking, Ploetz seems to view as a *Rasse* any interbreeding human population that, over the course of generations,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²¹ Alfred Ploetz, *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse und der Schutz der Schwachen. Ein Versuch über Rassenhygiene und ihr Verhältnis zu den humanen Idealen, besonders zum Socialismus* (Berlin: Fischer, 1895). The work was intended to be the first part of a two-part study entitled *Grundlagen einer Rassenhygiene* (Foundations of race hygiene). The other section was never completed.

²² Alfred Ploetz, “Rassentüchtigkeit und Sozialismus,” *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, 1894, 5:989–997; and Ploetz, *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse*, esp. Ch. 3.

²³ Ploetz, *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse*, p. 5.

continues to demonstrate similar physical and mental traits. This imprecise term could denote any small ethnic community, a nation, an anthropological race, or the entire human race.²⁴ Ploetz's use of his newly coined term *Rassenhygiene* is equally broad and vague, denoting the hygiene of any and all of these groups. Somewhat later he described race hygiene as the measures needed to ensure "the optimal preservation and development of a race." Hence the term referred to the hereditary improvement of such disparate populations as the Jews, the Germans, the "Aryans," and all humanity. Lenz later suggested that Ploetz was not familiar with Francis Galton's term *eugenics* when he wrote his book and simply chose the word *Rassenhygiene*. In later publications Ploetz explained that *Rassenhygiene* had a much larger scope than the English term *eugenics*, embracing not only those measures designed to improve the hereditary quality of a population but also those aimed at achieving its so-called optimal size.²⁵ As alternatives, he could later have used either the Germanized form of the word *eugenics*, *Eugenik*, or employed *Rassehygiene* (hygiene of the human race), as Schallmayer suggested.

What Ploetz actually thought about race is most clearly revealed in *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse*, the one published source in which he devotes a significant amount of discussion to these questions: "The hygiene of the entire human race converges with that of the Aryan race, which apart from a few small races, like the Jewish race—itself quite probably overwhelmingly Aryan in composition—is the cultural race *par excellence*. To advance it is tantamount to the advancement of all humanity." Although he states elsewhere that Germanic stock probably represents the best portion of the "Aryan race," he is primarily concerned here with whites in general. His views regarding the alleged cultural superiority of white people, however outrageously chauvinistic, were not fundamentally different from those of Schallmayer (who was vehemently opposed to the Aryan mystique) or, indeed, from those of most European intellectuals of his time. Nor was his pro-Aryan sentiment in any way anti-Semitic. Ploetz was, if anything, pro-Semitic at the time he wrote his book (although his views later appear to have changed).²⁶ Not only did he stress the significant role played by Jews in the intellectual history of humanity, placing them on the same level as the Aryans in terms of their cultural capacity, but he also opposed all attempts to ghettoize or otherwise separate the former from the latter. He was strongly in favor of marriages between Jews and Aryans on the grounds that these would be both socially and *biologically* advantageous. Ploetz wrote his treatise at a time when economic anti-Semitism was making a strong comeback in Germany. His favorable discussion of the Jews, he stated, was included in his work partly in order to combat the new trend. He had, at least at the time, little patience with Jew-haters. "All anti-Semitism is a pointless pursuit—a pursuit whose support will slowly recede

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2; see also Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im dritten Reich" (cit. n. 2), pp. 115–116.

²⁵ Alfred Ploetz, "Die Begriffe Rasse und Gesellschaft und die davon abgeleiteten Disziplinen," *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie*, 1904, 1:2–26, on p. 11. For Ploetz's discussion of the numerous subdivisions of *Rassenhygiene* see his "Zur Abgrenzung und Einteilung des Begriffs Rassenhygiene," *ibid.*, 1906, 3:864–866, on p. 865.

²⁶ Ploetz, *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse* (cit. n. 21), p. 5. Although Ploetz does not discuss his views on the Jews, his letters to his lifelong friend Gerhart Hauptmann, written during the Third Reich, show evidence of at least tacit support for the Nazi regime. Anyone who views himself as a "Mithelfer des dritten Reiches" could hardly have been pro-Semitic; see Ploetz to Hauptmann, 12 Oct. 1936, GH Br NL A. Ploetz, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin.

with the tide of scientific knowledge and humane democracy," as he said in *Die Tüchtigkeit*.²⁷ Hence, the ideas expressed in this book could later be incorporated into Nazi racial policy only by misrepresenting the views of the author.

Although Ploetz discussed the merits of the Aryan race at length and defined the terms *Rasse* and *Rassenhygiene*, the major purpose of his book lay elsewhere. Above all, Ploetz sought to reconcile the inherent conflict between the Darwinian world view and the humanitarian-socialist ideal through a conscious policy of "control over variation." He had in mind a utopian vision of pushing selection back to the prefertilization stage—a form of germ plasm selection. According to this plan, the genetically best germ cells of all married couples would be chosen as the hereditary endowment for the next generation. As a result, inhumane social measures and economic systems previously deemed necessary to avert biological decline would become superfluous. "The more we can prevent the production of inferior variations," Ploetz asserted, "the less we need the struggle for existence to eliminate them."²⁸ Although Ploetz's particular solution to the "degeneration problem" was unfeasible and was never seriously entertained by any of Germany's race hygienists, it embodied the view, shared by Schallmayer and later by other eugenicists, that population was a resource amenable to "rational management." As such, it was a biomedical solution to sociopolitical problems: eugenics experts, armed with their knowledge of evolutionary theory and the laws of heredity, would solve the social question with the aid of science.

Although Ploetz's work was the first to employ the term *Rassenhygiene*, it was not the first treatise on eugenics to be published in Germany. The author of the earliest such tract was the Bavarian physician Wilhelm Schallmayer.

Wilhelm Schallmayer

Schallmayer's intellectual biography and early career closely parallel those of Ploetz. Schallmayer was born in Mindelheim, Bavaria. Like Ploetz, he enjoyed the comforts of middle-class life. His father was the owner of a prosperous carriage and wagon business. Before turning to medicine, Schallmayer studied economics, sociology, and socialist theory for two years at the University of Leipzig; he found the works of Karl Marx and the German economist and social theorist Alfred Schaeffle especially interesting.²⁹ Yet despite the interest he shared with Ploetz in the *soziale Frage* and socialist theory, Schallmayer's concern was purely theoretical—at least until he realized that a faulty social and economic system could have grave eugenic consequences. Unlike Ploetz, he never harbored utopian dreams of building a socialist Germanic community in the New World. Indeed, throughout his life he refused to embrace those ideologies of Aryan supremacy so important to Ploetz and several other eugenicists.

In 1881 Schallmayer enrolled in medicine at Munich. Upon completion of his degree he secured an internship in the university hospital's psychiatric clinic, where he worked under Bernhard von Gudden (1824–1886). It is possible only to

²⁷ Ploetz, *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse*, p. 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 226–239; see Graham, "Science and Values" (cit. n. 3), p. 1137.

²⁹ Max von Gruber, "Wilhelm Schallmayer," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1922, 14:52–56, on p. 55; and Fritz Lenz, "Wilhelm Schallmayer," *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 1919, 66:1294–1296, on p. 1295.

speculate on how Schallmayer's internship might have influenced his later eugenic thought. He undoubtedly witnessed some of the most severe forms of insanity, thus becoming directly acquainted with many "mental defectives." Regarding the treatment and care of the insane and retarded, the young physician probably came away with the views of his teacher, which, as one obituary of von Gudden reported, amounted to a "near complete resignation regarding the effectiveness of medical intervention."³⁰

Precisely when Schallmayer became interested in eugenics is unknown. It seems likely, however, that his work in the psychiatric clinic led him to doubt the value of medicine for improving the health of the race. A self-proclaimed social Darwinist and an admirer of Haeckel, he could not have failed to see the connection between his clinical experience and the articulation of the counterselective effects of medicine presented in *The History of Creation*. Schallmayer's own experiences working with "mental defectives," coupled with his "selectionist" outlook, accounted for his own indictment of therapeutic medicine in his first eugenic treatise, a short work entitled *Über die drohende körperliche Entartung der Kulturmenschheit* (Concerning the threatening physical degeneration of civilized humanity). Published in 1891, and reprinted under a slightly different title in 1895, it was Germany's first eugenic tract.³¹

Although Schallmayer's slim volume attracted even less attention than Ploetz's treatise would four years later, it touched on the social, economic, and political justifications for eugenics, and it offered such practical proposals as the creation of medical genealogies and health passports and the introduction of marriage restrictions.³² Schallmayer's book also stressed the role of physicians and the importance of education and propaganda as the most effective means of achieving eugenic goals—two hallmarks of German race hygiene policy until 1933. Most important, however, Schallmayer's treatise emphasized the technocratic logic and the cost-benefit analysis that later so colored the race hygiene movement.

Schallmayer's frustrations over the limitations of therapeutic medicine also shaped his personal career. Soon after he began work as a general practitioner, he decided to specialize in urology and gynecology. At least in this area, Schallmayer thought, the prevention and treatment of disease would benefit future generations as well as the individual. Ultimately, however, he found even this work disappointing. Like Ploetz, Schallmayer was eager to devote all his time to the cause of eugenics. So, in 1897, after he had acquired sufficient means to give up his lucrative medical practice in Düsseldorf, Schallmayer settled down as *Privatgelehrter*.³³ His newly won freedom afforded him the time to compose a second eugenic treatise with the specific intention of submitting it to the Krupp *Preisausschreiben*.

In 1900 Friedrich Krupp, son of Essen's munitions baron Alfred Krupp, set aside 30,000 marks to be used in a contest to answer the question: What can we learn from the theory of evolution about internal political development and state legislation? It seems likely that Krupp, an amateur biologist, greatly resented

³⁰ Emil Kraepelin, "Berhard von Gudden," *Münch. Med. Wochenschr.*, 1886, 33:577–607, on p. 607; see also Gruber, "Wilhelm Schallmayer" (cit. n. 29), p. 55.

³¹ Wilhelm Schallmayer, *Die drohende physische Entartung der Culturvölker* (2nd ed., Neuwied: Heuser, 1895). I have been unable to obtain a copy of the first edition of Schallmayer's book. From the reviews of the first edition, it seems that the second edition varied little, if at all.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 23–32.

³³ Lenz, "Wilhelm Schallmayer" (cit. n. 29), p. 1295.

Social Democratic attempts to use Darwin's theory in support of socialism. Wishing to remain anonymous, Krupp delegated most of the responsibility for the contest to politically sympathetic scholars, with Ernst Haeckel brought in as a figurehead.³⁴

On 7 March 1903 the prize committee announced that first prize in the contest was awarded to Schallmayer's *Vererbung und Auslese im Lebenslauf der Völker* (Heredity and selection in the life process of nations), a dense 381-page treatise representing, in Heinrich Ernst Ziegler's appraisal, a "hygienic-sociological" approach to the question. Schallmayer certainly saw the practical and political aims of his book as timely. Whereas the nineteenth century had been concerned with Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis on a purely theoretical level, "the twentieth century," argued Schallmayer, "is called upon to apply the theory of descent to everyday life."³⁵

The book's central theme was the rational management of national efficiency. The real political lesson to be learned from Darwin's theory was that long-term state power depended upon the biological vitality of the nation; neglect of the hereditary fitness of its population, such as might result from unenlightened laws and customs, was "bad politics" and would inevitably result in the downfall of the state. Hence the wise politician "would recognize that the future of his nation is dependent on the *good management* of its human resources." In the interest of self-preservation, he argued, it was imperative that Germany take an active part in regulating the overall biological efficiency of its citizens by embarking on a political program that would encourage the biologically best elements in society to reproduce more than those with objectionable hereditary traits. Eugenics, or *Vererbungshygiene* (hereditary hygiene), as he still called it, was the perfect tool to ensure a strong and healthy state; it went hand in hand with his political ideal—a meritocracy.³⁶

Schallmayer also presented his readers with a series of eugenics reforms, but he was very cautious in the area of negative eugenics. Although he clearly believed that marriage restrictions for the insane, the feeble-minded, the chronic alcoholic, and other defectives were in the best interest of the state and the race, he refrained from openly supporting state legislation as a means to this end. Until such time as more exact information regarding the laws of heredity was known, and enough detailed genealogies could be amassed, he felt that eugenicists would have to concentrate on voluntary measures. He emphasized positive eugenics: convincing the "fitter" groups in society to increase their fertility rate. The question of course remained, Which groups were, biologically speaking, the "fittest"? Schallmayer assumed that biology would one day decide the question objectively. "In the meantime," he argued, "it would not be incorrect to view highly

³⁴ Heinrich Ernst Ziegler, "Einleitung zu dem Sammelwerke Natur und Staat," in *Natur und Staat: Beiträge zur naturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaftslehre* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1903), pp. 1-4; Ziegler to Haeckel, 4 Oct. 1899, Ernst-Haeckel-Haus Jena, Best. A-Abt. 1 No n 00005; Krupp "Niederschrift," Jan. 1900, Krupp-Archiv Essen, IX-d-244, and correspondence in III-D-159. I want to thank Jeffrey Johnson for his notes from the Krupp-Archiv. For a fuller discussion see Sheila Faith Weiss, *Race Hygiene and National Efficiency: The Eugenics of Wilhelm Schallmayer* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: Univ. California Press, forthcoming 1987), Ch. 3.

³⁵ Wilhelm Schallmayer, *Vererbung und Auslese im Lebenslauf der Völker: Eine staatswissenschaftliche Studie auf Grund der neueren Biologie* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1903), p. x. The treatise went through two revised editions (1910 and 1918).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-381 (quotation: emphasis in original), 354, 373. Schallmayer's clearest position regarding meritocracy can be found in "Rassehygiene und Sozialismus," *Die Neue Zeit*, 1907, 25:731-740, on p. 735.

socially productive individuals, especially the better educated, as being, on the average, more biologically valuable." Civil servants, officers, and teachers were encouraged to marry as early as possible. Those who chose to remain single should suffer some sort of financial disadvantage. To encourage civil servants to have larger families, Schallmayer suggested they be given a bonus for each school-aged child.³⁷ The class bias implicit in Schallmayer's criteria could hardly be more blatant; his own social group, the *Bildungsbürgertum*, turns out to be the "fittest." Other eugenicists shared this orientation.

THE WILHELMINE RACE HYGIENE MOVEMENT, 1904-1918

The Journal and the Society

The Krupp competition marked a turning point both in Schallmayer's personal career and in the attention paid to eugenics in Germany. Prior to this time Schallmayer and Ploetz were virtually lone prophets in their eugenics crusade. To be sure, there were undoubtedly other Germans concerned with similar issues; yet insofar as they were not personal friends of either of the two cofounders, they remained in complete intellectual isolation. Only in the years immediately following the publication of *Vererbung und Auslese* in 1903 were the first institutional steps undertaken to transform an idea into a movement: the creation of Germany's most respected eugenics journal and the foundation of a race hygiene society.

The *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie*, the first journal in the world dedicated to eugenics, was founded by Ploetz in 1904. Although there is no direct evidence linking the creation of the journal with the results of the Krupp contest, it seems likely that the scientific recognition and public attention given eugenics in the immediate aftermath of the *Preisausschreiben* at least suggested to Ploetz and his two assistant editors, the sociologist and economist Anastasius Nordenholz and the zoologist Ludwig Plate, that a more organized and "strictly scientific" manner of discourse on the subject was possible. Without openly admitting it, the editors of the *Archiv* sought to establish a more clearly focused and academically prestigious form of the *Politisch-anthropologische Revue*—a journal that occasionally carried articles on eugenics-related issues but was not taken seriously by most professionals because of its unmistakably *völkisch* tone. During the first four years the *Archiv* was financed by the publishers themselves. By 1908 the journal had proved marketable enough to convince a publishing company to underwrite the cost of its production; whether Ploetz, who was independently wealthy owing to his marriage to Nordenholz's sister, continued to help finance it is unknown.³⁸

The *Archiv* sought to attract a wide variety of articles bearing on the "optimal preservation and development of the race."³⁹ It included entries not only by

³⁷ Schallmayer, *Vererbung und Auslese*, 1st ed. (1903), p. 338.

³⁸ Ploetz married Anita Nordenholz after divorcing Ernst Rüdin's sister. The Nordenholzes were the children of a wealthy merchant family from Bremen. This marriage enabled Ploetz to retire from his medical practice and devote his time exclusively to eugenics. He settled with his wife on their estate in Herrsching, near Munich; see Heinrich Reichel, "Alfred Ploetz und die rassenhygienische Bewegung der Gegenwart," *Wienischer Klinische Wochenschrift*, 1931, 44:1-9, on p. 6.

³⁹ Alfred Ploetz, Anastasius Nordenholz, and Ludwig Plate, "Vorwort," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1904, 1:iii-vi, on p. iv.

Germany's prominent race hygienists but also from individuals who in no sense considered themselves eugenicists. Most of the articles appearing in the journal during the Wilhelmine period fall into one of five categories: technical articles dealing with genetics and evolution by such leading biologists as Weismann, Plate, Ziegler, Richard Semon, Carl Correns, Hugo deVries, Erich von Tschermak, and Wilhelm Johannsen; entries concerned with so-called degenerative phenomena (insanity, alcoholism, homosexuality, etc.); articles preoccupied with the alleged dysgenic effects of certain social institutions and practices (medicine, welfare, etc.) and the social and economic costs of "protecting the weak"; studies pertaining to the need for population increase and the hazards of neo-Malthusianism; and a potpourri of anthropological contributions, including many racialist, but not always racist, articles as well as high-quality entries from the eminent anthropologist Franz Boas.

Besides publishing rather specialized and lengthy articles, the *Archiv* also tried to keep its readers abreast of developments in eugenics through its numerous book reviews and announcements. Its volumes were substantial indeed—the four quarterly issues together often totaled more than six hundred pages. Although most educated middle-class Germans could have "plowed through" the *Archiv*, the long, dry, and technical articles made neither enjoyable nor easy reading. Its national and international reputation as a highly respected scholarly publication notwithstanding, the journal did little to spread the eugenics gospel in Germany beyond the small group of professionals already committed to the new discipline.

The second institutional development was the formation of the Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (Society for Race Hygiene)—the world's first professional eugenics organization. Founded in Berlin on 22 June 1905 by Ploetz, Nordenholz, the psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin (who was also Ploetz's former brother-in-law), and the ethnologist Richard Thurnwald, the society had as its aim "the study of the relationship of selection and elimination among individuals as well as the inheritance and variability of their physical and mental traits."⁴⁰ Although there is some confusion as to the exact title of the organization during the first two years of its history, there is little doubt that Ploetz always intended the society, which had begun with only twenty-four members, to be international. Since the word *Rasse* was frequently used by Ploetz as a synonym for "white race," any race hygiene society worthy of the name had to transcend national boundaries and embrace individuals from all white "civilized" nations. Yet it was not until 1907 that the Gesellschaft was able to attract anyone from other countries, at which time it became the Internationale Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene. Two local groups of the Gesellschaft, in Berlin and Munich, were formed soon after.⁴¹

The society wished not merely to spread the eugenics gospel but also, and perhaps more important, to serve as a model for what rational selection could accomplish. By offering membership only to those white individuals who were "ethically, intellectually, and physically fit" and from whom "economic prosperity could be expected," the society proposed to demonstrate from statistics collected on both the members and their progeny "how much better the vital statistics, the military fitness, and physical and intellectual efficiency are, compared to

⁴⁰ Alfred Ploetz, "Denkschrift über die Gründung der Internationale Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene," 1907, Ploetz family archives, Herrsching, West Germany, p. 3.

⁴¹ "Zweite Bericht der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene," 1907, Ploetz family archive, pp. 1, 17.

the population at large . . . and how much more efficient the population of a state would necessarily be that followed race hygiene principles."⁴² The society's understanding of "fitness" thus mirrored Schallmayer's own definition of the term: the most important criteria for eligibility were material success and social usefulness.

The Internationale Gesellschaft did not articulate any specific social policy or proposals. However, at a meeting of public hygienists in 1910, Ploetz set forth a list of practical goals that included the following:

- (a) Opposition to the two-child system, fostering "fit" families with large numbers of children, combatting luxury, reestablishment of the motherhood ideal, strengthening the commitment to the family;
- (b) Establishment of a counterbalance to the protection of the weak by means of isolation, marriage restrictions, etc., designed to prevent the reproduction of the inferior; support of the reproduction of the fit through economic measures designed to make early marriages and large families possible (especially in the higher classes);
- (c) Opposition to all germ-plasm poisons, especially syphilis, tuberculosis, and alcohol;
- (d) Protection against inferior immigrants and the settlement of fit population groups in those areas presently occupied by inferior elements—to be accomplished, if need be, through the expropriation laws;
- (e) Preservation and increase of the peasant class;
- (f) Introduction of favorable hygienic conditions for the industrial and urban population;
- (g) Preservation of the military capabilities of the civilized nations;
- (h) Extension of the reigning ideal of brotherly love by an ideal of modern chivalry, which combines the protection of the weak with the elevation of the moral and physical strength and fitness (*Tüchtigkeit*) of the individual.⁴³

These proposals reflect the international orientation of Ploetz and the early movement while simultaneously demonstrating their concern with national efficiency. The explicit statement regarding the encouragement of marriages and large families among members of the upper class once again shows the tendency to equate fitness with class. Belonging to the so-called Nordic or Germanic race, interestingly enough, was not a criterion for *Tüchtigkeit*; indeed, the terms *Nordic* and *Germanic* do not appear in the list of tasks and programs. Having mentioned in his speech the lack of any general consensus regarding what constitutes the best race, as well as the rarity of finding pure races anywhere in Europe, Ploetz was indeed reluctant to make special claims for the Nordic population. Since, as he argued, "all these races [Alpine, Jewish, etc.] are seldom found pure here, it is best . . . to rely on fitness as a guide. This is because fitness—both individual and social—is the true guiding star. What particular colors or shapes are attached to [fitness] will come to light in the future."⁴⁴ Although Ploetz may have had a particular interest in the Nordic race, his position does suggest that fitness, as defined in terms of social and cultural productivity, was the true measure of the worth of both individuals and races. This belief remained the cornerstone of both his eugenic policy and that of the movement before 1933.

In 1910, the year in which Ploetz presented these proposals, the individual

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3; Ploetz, "Denkschrift über die Gründung" (cit. n. 40), p. 5.

⁴³ Alfred Ploetz, "Ziele und Aufgaben der Rassenhygiene," *Vierteljahresschrift für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, 1911, 43:164–191, on p. 165.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Table 1. Occupational Composition of the Society for Race Hygiene

Occupation	1907 (International Society)		1913 (German Society)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Physicians and medical students	27	32.5	136	33.4
Nonmedical academics	14	16.9	76	18.7
Writers and artists	10	12.1	22	5.4
Civil servants and teachers	3	3.6	29	7.1
Miscellaneous	7	8.4	78	19.2
Wives*	<u>22</u>	<u>26.5</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>16.2</u>
Totals	83	100.0	407	100.0

SOURCES: Zweite Bericht der Internationale Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, 1907, and Mitglieder-liste der Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, 1913, Ploetz family archives, Herrsching, West Germany.

* Includes only those women, listed with their husbands, who had no other occupation.

German *Ortsgruppen* (chapters) were brought under the banner of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, which was initially a sort of national subdivision of the Internationale Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene. Yet the international society was not to last. By 1916, in the wake of both World War I and the creation of numerous national eugenics societies in Europe and the United States, Ploetz was forced to give up his dream of a single “intellectual center” for the preservation of the race. At this time the German society officially supplanted the international society; it had long since done so in practice.⁴⁵

In the meantime the total membership remained small, but also grew steadily, and the occupational and class backgrounds of the members of the two societies continued to mirror those of its founders and leaders (Table 1). In both the international and the German society *Bildungsbürger* dominated the membership. Table 1 also reveals that medical professionals made up the single largest group in both organizations, accounting for approximately one third of those affiliated with the two societies. It seems likely that the self-image of German physicians as custodians of the nation’s health had much to do with the disproportionate number of prominent physicians, hygienists, and professors of medicine in the early movement. Of the academics from other fields enrolled in the two societies, most were professors of zoology and anthropology. In addition to Ernst Haeckel and August Weismann, who as honorary members probably did not participate much in its activities, the Deutsche Gesellschaft included such distinguished biologists as Ludwig Plate, Heinrich Ernst Ziegler, and Erwin Baur. The two societies also included members of virtually all German political parties; moreover, Jews, as well as Protestants and Catholics, were among the members.⁴⁶ The only specific qualifications mentioned in the statutes were that members be both white and “fit.”

⁴⁵ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, 1910 Satzungen, Ploetz family archives; Eugen Fischer, “Aus der Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1930, 24:1–5, on p. 3.

⁴⁶ Alfred Ploetz, “Gesellschaften mit rassenhygienischen Zwecken,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1909, 6:277–281, on p. 278.

The Intellectual Development of Wilhelmine Eugenics

The writings of Wilhelmine Germany's race hygienists exhibit some common themes and concerns. The primary intellectual preoccupation of the early movement was with collecting and analyzing data on degeneration. A study of the celebrated Family Zero—a kind of Swiss counterpart to the legendary American Jukes family—was undertaken to demonstrate that central Europe had its own share of degenerate stock. The psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin wrote numerous studies dealing with the inheritance of insanity—emphasizing the Mendelian nature of the transmission of various kinds of mental disorders. Agnes Bluhm, Germany's only prominent female eugenicist, concentrated on proving the degenerative effects of alcohol on future generations and studying the alleged decreased ability of German women to breast-feed their infants.⁴⁷ Other eugenicists reported on such topics as the increase in venereal disease in large cities and its impact on the race, the degenerative effects of homosexuality, and the need to reform Germany's penal code along eugenic lines.⁴⁸ By and large the tone of these studies was scientific, not popular; they seem to have been written less to stir people to action than to communicate abstract information.

Like eugenicists in the United States and Britain, the Germans also analyzed the cost of maintaining the army of the unfit. The word most often used to describe these individuals was *Minderwertigen*—a term that literally means “the less valuable” and was frequently employed as a synonym for nonproductive people. Certainly the *Umschau*, a popular science journal, used the word in this way when, in 1911, it sponsored a written contest entitled: “What do the inferior elements [*Minderwertigen*] cost the state and society?” Accepting the premise that “all efforts to improve the environment break down in the face of hereditary sickness and inferiority,” the sponsors of the competition suggested to potential contestants that only a reduction in the number of “minus variants” would allow society to continue to preserve the life of all those living. Only five contestants applied for the prize, however, and the problem did not yet generate the great concern that it would during Weimar.⁴⁹

In his commentary on the cost of the unfit, Ignaz Kaup, professor of hygiene and member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft, reported on the results of a seminar held to discuss the subject. Since he doubted that the German people were ready to accept American-style sterilization methods as a means of alleviating the problem, some way of physically separating the “unfit” from the rest of society was necessary. False humanitarian considerations were not appropriate, since “all forward-striving nations had the duty to ease the burden of the cost of the inferior as much as possible.” Recognizing that the *Minderwertigen* were a financial burden to the state who “despite the expenditure paid out on their behalf are almost never in the position during their working lives to repay the money spent on them,” Kaup recommended the creation of work colonies where they could

⁴⁷ J. Jörger, “Die Familie Zero,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1905, 2:494–559; and Alfred Ploetz, “Dr. Agnes Bluhm 70 Jahre am 9. Januar 1932,” *ibid.*, 1932, 26:63.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Fritz Lenz, “Über die Verbreitung der Lues, speziell in Berlin, und ihre Bedeutung als Faktor des Rassentodes,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1910, 7:306–327; Ernst Rüdin, “Zur Rolle der Homosexuellen im Lebensprozess der Rasse,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1904, 1:99–109; and H. von Hentig, *Strafrecht und Auslese* (Berlin: Springer, 1914).

⁴⁹ Ignaz Kaup, “Was kosten die minderwertigen Elemente dem Staat und der Gesellschaft,” *Arch. Ras. Ges. Biol.*, 1913, 10:723–748, on p. 723.

be prevented from having inferior children and could be made to earn their keep at the same time.⁵⁰ At this time, however, most German eugenicists would have been satisfied with some form of permanent institutionalization.

As World War I approached, a third emphasis of the Wilhelmine eugenics movement came to the fore: *Bevölkerungspolitik* (population policy). While Germany's eugenicists did, of course, aim at instituting a eugenically healthy qualitative population policy, there was a marked tendency throughout the last years of the Empire to view the prevention of a decline in population growth as an important measure in its own right. As early as 1904 Alfred Grotjahn spoke of the "growth of population quantity" as the "*conditio sine qua non* of a rational prophylaxis against degeneration." Later the issue had become more pressing: as Schallmayer put it in 1915, arresting population decline was nothing short of "a matter of survival for the German nation."⁵¹

In order to understand why German eugenicists became obsessed with the population question, it is worth discussing briefly the prewar demographic, social, and political changes in Germany that colored their intellectual perspective. On the surface there seemed little cause for alarm. Wilhelmine Germany was the second most populous country in Europe; it had also witnessed a very substantial population increase of twenty-four million people between 1871 and 1910. Yet this healthy population growth owed far more to the dramatic decline in the death rate, particularly the infant mortality rate, than to a growth in fertility. Indeed Germany, like all Western industrialized nations, experienced a steady birthrate decline during the last third of the nineteenth and first third of the twentieth centuries. Between 1902 and 1914, for example, the Reich suffered an 8.3 per thousand drop in the number of live births.⁵² This and the steady decline in the excess of births over deaths after 1902 gave statisticians and eugenicists cause to expect an eventual population standstill or even a decline. Many sought to account for Germany's declining birthrate; however much their explanations differed, all investigators agreed on two points: that the actual decline in population growth was less frightening than the prospect that Germany's situation might soon begin to mirror French demographic realities, and that the drop in the birthrate was deliberate and was directly related to the practice of birth control methods advanced by supporters of neo-Malthusianism.⁵³

Considered by Rüdin and the president of the Deutsche Gesellschaft, Gruber, to be even more dangerous than the "relative increase of the unfit,"⁵⁴ German neo-Malthusianism encouraged birth control as a means of eliminating poverty and its attendant social problems. Much work remains to be done on neo-Malthusianism in Germany, but it seems likely that the German movement received

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 747, 748.

⁵¹ Alfred Grotjahn, "Soziale Hygiene und Entartungsproblem," in *Handbuch der Hygiene*, ed. Th. Weyl, Suppl. Vol. IV (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1904), pp. 727-789, on p. 761; and Wilhelm Schallmayer, "Zur Bevölkerungspolitik gegenüber dem durch den Krieg verursachten Frauenüberschuß," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1914/1915, 11:713-737, on p. 729.

⁵² Gerd Horhorst, Jürgen Kocka, and Gerhard A. Ritter, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch. Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreiches 1870-1914* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1974), pp. 15, 29-30.

⁵³ Lujo Brentano, "Die Malthusische Lehre und die Bevölkerungsbewegung der letzten Dezenen," *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1908-1909, pp. 567-625; Julius Wolf, *Der Geburtenrückgang* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1912); and Reinhold Seeberg, *Der Geburtenrückgang in Deutschland* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1913).

⁵⁴ Max von Gruber and Ernst Rüdin, *Fortflanzung, Vererbung, Rassenhygiene* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1911), p. 158.

its impetus and theoretical direction from the English Malthusian League. As was the case in England, many German reform-minded liberals and socialists saw the movement as the only hope for improving the conditions of the working class. For active German feminists and the growing number of liberal, university-educated, middle-class women, however, birth control was also a means of emancipation from the drudgery of unwanted pregnancies and a prerequisite for more productive and intellectually meaningful lives.⁵⁵

What made the so-called antibaby and antimotherhood propaganda of the feminists and the neo-Malthusians so disturbing was the deterioration in the international political climate after 1900, particularly the direct challenges to Western European hegemony and the growing belief in the possibility of war. The rise of Japan to the status of a world power and the fear of a revitalized China with its burgeoning population and its potential military superiority raised the specter of a "yellow peril"—a term coined by Emperor William II and popularized after the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905.⁵⁶ Even more disconcerting from the German eugenicists' point of view, however, was the Slavic threat: with its army of over a million men, Russia bordered the Reich and was allied with her potential enemies, England and France. In a paper attacking neo-Malthusianism at the First International Eugenics Congress in London in 1912, Ploetz indicated that the Slavic threat was biological as well as political: while Western Europeans and Americans exhibited a decline in fertility, Ploetz lamented, the "Poles, Hungarians, Russians, and South Slavs—nationalities with strong Asiatic traits—have an extremely high birth rate such that they are everywhere successfully pushing westward. . . . The preservation of the Nordic race," he argued, "is severely threatened as a result." Schallmayer also expressed fear over the potential Slavization of Germany, although he viewed it as a threat to the Reich rather than to the well-being of some mystical Nordic stock.⁵⁷ By 1910 most German race hygienists agreed that without some means of combating neo-Malthusianism the biological efficiency of the Empire would be severely impaired.

This new and unhealthy state of affairs required not only that Germany and Western Europe produce more people, but also that they produce the right kind of people. What horrified eugenicists most was the alleged counterselective impact of birth control practice: the biologically "superior" upper and educated middle classes were limiting the size of their families, while the defectives and "less fit" were not. Even before the war German eugenicists, like their British and American counterparts, were bemoaning the inverse relationship between social usefulness and fertility. At the well-publicized International Hygiene Exhibition in 1911, a battery of charts and graphs plotting demographic trends in France, Denmark, Holland, England, and Germany pointed to a time in the not-too-distant future when Western Europe would be without the standardbearers of

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the English Malthusians see Rosanna Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League, 1877–1927* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1976); and Richard Allen Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930* (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 1982). On German feminism see Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894–1933* (London: Sage, 1976), pp. 115–143.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 81.

⁵⁷ Alfred Ploetz, "Neomalthusianismus und Rassenhygiene," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1913, 10:166–172, on p. 171; and Wilhelm Schallmayer, "Die Politik der Fruchtbarkeitsbeschränkungen," *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 1908, 2:391–439, on p. 411.

its culture: the upper and educated middle classes. "In order to flourish, indeed in order to survive," Gruber and Rüdin asserted, "a people needs a sufficient number of hands and a sufficient number of heads to rule those hands."⁵⁸

After the outbreak of the war, the realization that the fighting was likely to continue far longer than originally expected only intensified German race hygienists' concern with the population question. For men such as Schallmayer, Ploetz, Gruber, and Lenz, World War I was a kind of necessary evil—necessary because they, like most Germans, believed that the Empire was provoked into war; evil because they realized the immeasurable biological damage it would inflict not only upon Germany but also upon other Western nations. Most believed that Russia, never part of the West as far as German eugenicists were concerned, would come out of the war with its biological efficiency relatively unscathed.⁵⁹ It would hence continue to be Germany's greatest political and biological threat.

In the face of a war that would, according to Lenz, deplete the Reich of its "racial capital,"⁶⁰ leaving it prey to its hostile enemies (primarily Russia and France), eugenicists sought to devise a series of reform plans and programs to offset the anticipated quantitative and qualitative population loss. Even before the actual fighting began, the Deutsche Gesellschaft issued a set of resolutions aimed at halting birthrate decline. They were published in the *Archiv* and then translated for the American *Journal of Heredity*. Among the most important were an inner colonization (back-to-the-farm) movement with privileges for large families; economic assistance to large families and consideration of the size of public and private employees' families in determining wages; abolition of impediments to early marriage for army officers and government employees; obligatory exchange of health certificates before marriage; prizes to artists who glorify the ideal of motherhood, family, and the simple life; and attempts to awaken a sense of duty toward the coming generation—including education of the youth in this direction.⁶¹ Some eugenicists had additional plans for boosting Germany's national efficiency—plans that stressed qualitative population policy more than those officially adopted by the society. Gruber and Schallmayer, for example, suggested a plan to reform Germany's inheritance laws so that if a deceased father had left fewer than four children, a portion of the inheritance would be turned over to relatives (Gruber) or the state.⁶² Yet German eugenicists remained committed to talk rather than action—neither the society's proposals nor those of any other eugenicist were adopted by the government. During the war new organizations preoccupied with the population problem proliferated, including the German Society for Population Policy (1915, ca. 100 members) and the Alliance for the Preservation and Increase of German National Strength (1915, ca. 1,000 members).⁶³ Yet despite these organizations, and despite the interest in race

⁵⁸ Gruber and Rüdin, *Fortflanzung, Vererbung, Rassenhygiene* (cit. n. 54), pp. 158–163, on p. 158.

⁵⁹ Wilhelm Schallmayer, "Kriegswirkungen am Volkskörper und ihre Heilung," *Die Umschau*, 1918, 22:1–24, on p. 22; and Fritz Lenz, "Vorschläge zur Bevölkerungspolitik mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Wirtschaftslage nach dem Kriege," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1918, 12:440–468, on p. 444.

⁶⁰ Lenz, "Vorschläge zur Bevölkerungspolitik," p. 440.

⁶¹ "Leitsätze der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene zur Geburtenfrage," *Arch. Ras. Ges. Biol.*, 1914, 11:134–135; and G. von Hoffmann, "Eugenics in Germany," *Journal of Heredity*, 1914, 5:435–436.

⁶² Schallmayer, *Vererbung und Auslese*, 3rd ed. (1918) (cit. n. 35), p. 336.

⁶³ Fritz Lenz, "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Bevölkerungspolitik," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1915, 11:555–557; and Wilhelm Schallmayer, "Neue Aufgaben und neue Organisation der Gesundheitspolitik," *Archiv für soziale Hygiene und Demographie*, 1919, 13:225–270, on pp. 258–259.

hygiene displayed for the first time by some government officials, not one eugenics-related law was passed during the Wilhelmine period.

There were undoubtedly many reasons for this state of affairs. Among them were the reluctance of German eugenicists to push for sterilization laws or other forms of negative eugenics and their emphasis on a rather abstract and diffuse set of positive eugenics proposals that would have been difficult to translate into concrete statutes. Initially, those in the vanguard of the movement had been content to educate the public as to the social and political need for eugenics. Having an exaggerated sense of their own importance as intellectual leaders of the nation, German race hygienists overestimated the power of their well-manicured public utterances. However, the social, political, and economic disaster brought on by the war both encouraged the growth of the movement and stimulated a bolder approach.

EUGENICS IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC, 1918–1933

The three major concerns of Wilhelmine race hygiene—degenerative phenomena, analysis of the burden of the *Minderwertigen*, and population policy—continued to preoccupy the second generation of the movement. The Weimar years, however, witnessed an increased emphasis upon reducing the social cost of the unproductive. Whereas eugenicists had earlier spoken in very abstract terms about improving the “race”—however differently that term was understood by individual practitioners—race hygiene during the Republic was far more concerned with preventing the decline of the German *Volk* and state. This does not mean that the movement lost its international orientation entirely. German eugenicists continued to correspond with their English and American colleagues and, after the early 1920s, participated in international eugenics and genetics conferences. One still finds talk about saving “civilized nations” from degeneration. Yet on balance German eugenicists were absorbed with the problems besetting their own country. Especially during the early Weimar years, eugenicists saw the fatherland as engaged in a life-or-death geopolitical and economic struggle for survival with its Western European and Russian enemies.⁶⁴ Oppressed by the economic and psychological impact of the Versailles treaty and inflation, forced—as the geneticist Erwin Baur put it—to suffer foreign domination by people “culturally beneath them,” and consigned to live under an unstable and for the most part unloved republic, race hygienists realized that improving Germany’s biological and national efficiency was no longer of merely intellectual interest.⁶⁵

Fritz Lenz

The one person who did more than any other to spell out the importance of eugenics during the Weimar years was Fritz Lenz. A decidedly complex individual, Lenz became Weimar Germany’s most prominent and, in many ways, most

⁶⁴ Heinrich Ernst Ziegler, rev. of Oskar Hertwig, *Zur Abwehr des ethischen, des sozialen, des politischen Darwinismus*, *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1922, 14:212–218, on pp. 217–218.

⁶⁵ Baur to the American geneticist and eugenicist A. F. Blakeslee, 1921, printed in Bentley Glass, “A Hidden Chapter of German Eugenics between the Two World Wars,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 1981, 125:357–367, on p. 364.

controversial eugenicist. The death of Schallmayer in 1919, and Ploetz's growing reluctance to shoulder the burdens of discipline building, left Lenz as the acknowledged leader of the Munich chapter of the society—much to the dismay of his less conservative, non-Aryan-supremacist colleagues in Berlin. Lenz viewed himself as a student of Ploetz; he shared his mentor's enthusiasm for the Nordic race—an enthusiasm undoubtedly strengthened through his contact with the anthropologist Eugen Fischer (1874–1967), whom he met while enrolled as a medical student at the University of Freiburg. During his medical studies at Freiburg from 1906 until 1912, Lenz also attended the lectures of August Weismann. From his own account, Weismann made a lasting impression on him and was probably responsible for his lifelong interest in the inheritance of hereditary diseases and intelligence. Lenz's training made him particularly receptive to the ideas of Ploetz, whom he first met in 1909. From that time on he sought to devote his life to the “practical” application of the study of human heredity; even his medical dissertation, completed in 1912, stressed eugenic concerns.⁶⁶

Although Lenz was active in the Munich chapter of the society before the war, he first came to the attention of the international eugenics community in 1921 as coauthor of *Grundriß der menschlichen Erblchkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene* (Principles of human heredity and race hygiene). The treatise comprised two volumes. The first had a theoretical orientation and contained chapters by Erwin Baur on the principles of heredity, Eugen Fischer on the world's racial groups, and Lenz on human inheritance. The second volume, composed entirely by Lenz, dealt exclusively with race hygiene. Such respected American geneticists as Raymond Pearl and H. J. Muller considered the section written by Baur to be a clear and objective state-of-the-art summary; portions of Fischer's and Lenz's contributions, as they stood in the 1931 American edition of the text, were thought by Muller to be less so.⁶⁷ Even discounting the current prevalence of typological thinking about race, there can be little doubt that Fischer's and Lenz's discussions were largely a collection of personal and social prejudices masquerading as science. Given the important position Lenz held in the movement and the subsequent outcome of Nazi eugenics, it is worth examining his views on this subject further.

Like Galton and many other non-German eugenicists, Lenz believed in the reality of physical and mental racial traits. He understood these traits to be hereditary in the way that other traits common to all humans are hereditary. As such, according to Lenz, their relative frequency in a population was not static but was influenced by an all-powerful and ubiquitous selection process. Although he fully recognized physical differences between the world's races, he found these uninteresting in themselves and sometimes unreliable when it came to assessing an individual's racial type. Lenz concentrated almost exclusively on what he called the *seelische* (spiritual) differences, by which he meant the sum total of all nonphysical qualities of the major races. He clearly believed in a hierarchy of races, despite his comments to the contrary. Moreover, all talk of a transcendental “racial principle” aside, Western culture was the yardstick by which Lenz measured the “fitness” of races. Those races seen as having a high level of culture—by which he meant European and, in particular, German culture—were

⁶⁶ Rissom, *Fritz Lenz* (cit. n. 2), pp. 15–17.

⁶⁷ Reported in Glass, “Hidden Chapter of German Eugenics” (cit. n. 65), p. 357.

fitter and hence more worthy of preservation than others. Not surprisingly, the Negroid race stood at the bottom of the scale; the Nordics and the Jews (the latter comprising two main races, the Near Eastern and Oriental) were the most culturally productive. According to Lenz Nordic *man* was future-directed, steadfast, and prudent and hence able to subordinate sensual pleasure to more long-term goals; *he* was not only the religious and philosophical man *par excellence*—always searching but never finding what he needs—but he also exceeded all others in objectivity. Of Nordic *woman* he has less to say except that she, like women of other races, was on the average less objective than men. That, however, was no great problem, “since women have an entirely different mission to fulfill in the life of the race.”⁶⁸

Of course, Lenz did not recognize his sexism and the almost laughable manner in which he projected the values of the German educated middle class onto “Nordic man” as prejudices. Above all, Lenz thought of himself as an objective scientist who arrived at his conclusions after careful consideration of the facts. He found all demagoguery and emotionalism essentially “un-Aryan.” Indeed, in his critique of the “emotional” anti-Semitism found in Theodor Fritsch’s *Handbuch der Judenfrage*, Lenz accused the work of being too “Jewish” and insufficiently Germanic in its lack of “absolute objectivity.”⁶⁹ Given his temperament he could never have written an inflammatory book such as Madison Grant’s *The Passing of a Great Race*, though he was not reluctant to discuss its merits. This desire to remain *sachlich* (objective) undoubtedly colored his attitude toward Jews. Lenz’s anti-Semitism was of the subdued variety commonly found among conservative German academics. However, insofar as he believed in the reality of racial types and was hence forced to describe the “spiritual” elements of the Jewish race, his stereotypical caricature of Jews has occasionally led people to see him incorrectly as an intellectual forerunner of Hitler. Although hardly pro-Semitic, he considered the Jews to possess many of the admirable qualities that Nordics, as well as others, did not possess to the same degree—much to the dismay of Germany’s numerous rabid anti-Semites. Indeed, he felt that Nordics and Jews were more similar than dissimilar. What he did not like about the Jews (e.g., their preoccupation with making money and their liberal politics), he of course also projected onto their list of racial qualities, which he then attempted to relate to his reader in a cool objective manner. It is revealing of the degree to which typological thinking about race was generally accepted that Lenz’s book was praised even by Jewish authors. Lenz was proud that the respected Jewish sexologist Max Marcuse, a specialist in the area of venereal disease and prostitution, had apparently accepted his “very unprejudiced and purely objective depiction of the racial condition and psychic constitution of the Jews as compared to that of the Germans.”⁷⁰ As contemptible as Lenz was (especially for his willingness to cooperate with the Nazis after it was clear to him what *their* policies were), he seems to have believed that the promotion of the Nordic race need not go hand in hand with anti-Semitism. Although he later saw Hitler as the only political leader who truly embraced eugenic ideals, and as a result was favorably

⁶⁸ Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz, *Grundriß der menschlichen Erblichkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene*, 2 vols. (2nd ed., Munich: Lehmann, 1923), Vol. I, pp. 406, 409, 417–427, esp. pp. 419, 422 (quotation).

⁶⁹ Fritz Lenz, rev. of Theodor Fritsch, *Handbuch der Judenfrage*, *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1923, 15:428–432, on p. 431.

⁷⁰ Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), pp. 37–38, 426 (quotation).

disposed toward him as early as 1931, he found his maniacal anti-Semitism too extreme.⁷¹

While Lenz's acceptance of ideologies of Nordic supremacy was clearly evident in virtually everything he wrote, it should be pointed out that, of the more than six hundred pages he contributed to *Menschliche Erblchkeitslehre*, only about fifty dealt with the race question. The bulk of his work was concerned with topics such as the transmission of hereditary diseases, the inheritance of intelligence and talent, the methodology of genetic research, and the theoretical principles and practical teachings of race hygiene. In his discussion of the inheritance of disease and talent Lenz sometimes cited the work and methodology of British and American geneticists and eugenicists, most frequently Galton. A convinced Mendelian, Lenz sought to demonstrate the Mendelian pattern of inheritance for various pathological traits; when focusing his attention on "metrical" traits such as intelligence, he naturally used the statistical tools developed by the British biometricians. Having at least some training in genetics, he was far more knowledgeable than most German race hygienists about the newest developments in the field. In general, however, the technicalities of genetics were important to Lenz only insofar as they could be used to support and legitimize his eugenic views.

Lenz's major eugenic aim was the preservation of his own class, the *Bildungsbürgertum*, from biological extinction. Perhaps more than anyone else he viewed eugenics as a means of boosting Germany's level of cultural productivity. Although virtually all German eugenicists equated the "fit" with the educated and socially useful elements in society, nobody was crasser in his class prejudices than Lenz. "Productivity and success in social life," Lenz affirmed in his textbook, "serve as a measure of the worth of individuals and families." Indeed, for him, *Entartung* was virtually synonymous with a lack of culture. Lenz, even more than Schallmayer, saw the real threat of degeneration not in the marginal increase in the number of those with serious hereditary diseases but rather in the low birthrate of the educated middle class and the "extinction of highly talented and otherwise distinguished families." Contemptuous of the value of manual labor compared with that of "mental labor," Lenz was particularly dismayed at the drop in the standard of living of academics during the early years of the Republic, as well as by the supposedly preferential treatment shown to workers after 1918: "The German revolution had an overwhelmingly unfavorable selective effect. As a result of the one-sided promotion of the interest of the manual workers, those who work with their brains are forced into a terrible struggle for survival. . . . If one views German society as a whole, there can be little doubt that the results of the revolution will lead to the extinction of educated families—the primary standardbearers of German culture."⁷²

Yet for Lenz the events of 1918–1919 were not only dysgenic but also politically distasteful. A conservative academic, he belonged to the far-right-wing German National People's Party and had little tolerance for the Republic and its allegedly untalented leaders. He viewed the German revolution with horror, attributing it to the "extermination" of a large number of "socially minded" individuals on the battlefield. He found the new democratic order, with its promise

⁷¹ Fritz Lenz, "Die Stellung des Nationalsozialismus zur Rassenhygiene," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1931, 25:300–308, on p. 302.

⁷² Baur et al., *Grundriß* (cit. n. 68), Vol. II, pp. 206, 192, 63.

—however limited in reality—of increased social equality, both biologically and socially dangerous. It was a far cry from the political ideal he shared with Schallmayer: a meritocracy.⁷³

Berlin versus Munich

Lenz's influence and his Nordic sympathies were recognized and resented by the many non-Aryan-supremacists in the movement. Had Lenz's position been an entirely idiosyncratic one, prominent eugenicists such as Schallmayer (while he was still alive) and Grotjahn might have been annoyed, but relatively unconcerned about its impact on the long-term direction of the movement. They knew, however, that Lenz, while perhaps more extreme than most who adopted the "unscientific" doctrine of Aryan supremacy, was not alone. Gruber and Rüdin, for example, were known to be sympathetic to Lenz's point of view. Ploetz, it will be recalled, also embraced the Aryan Nordic mystique. Almost from the beginning a largely unadmitted conflict arose between those who believed that eugenics had nothing to do with ideologies of Aryan supremacy and those who, *in addition* to articulating the class-biased positions of their relatively nonracist colleagues, wished to leave the door open for an Aryan or Nordic race hygiene.

The conflict was both terminological and institutional. Schallmayer was so adamantly opposed to the racist connotation of *Rassenhygiene* that he never employed the word. During the early years of the movement he urged the adoption of the term *Rassehygiene*, and somewhat later he would favor *Rassedienst* (racial service)—both of which, because they avoided the plural *Rassen*, precluded the denotation of an anthropological race.⁷⁴ While supporting Schallmayer's efforts to rid race hygiene of all racist connotations, Grotjahn encouraged the use of yet another term, *Fortpflanzungshygiene* (reproductive hygiene)—a word that avoided all mention of *Rasse*.⁷⁵ Neither man favored the term *Eugenik*, despite its alleged neutrality and objectivity, since it was seen as excluding quantitative population policy. Of course, those whose sympathies for the "Nordic race" made the double connotation of the term *Rassenhygiene* desirable did what they could to defend its use. This was especially true of Lenz, who, in addition to admitting that its racial connotation was a point in its favor, offered self-serving linguistic and practical reasons for the continued use of Ploetz's term. His assertion that "race hygiene is of course advantageous to all races" did little to reassure those supporting a "scientific" eugenics that the movement would not be overrun with racist fanatics.⁷⁶

Pre-Weimar organizational developments reinforced these fears. Ploetz and his like-minded colleagues not only tolerated Aryan and Nordic enthusiasts; they also catered to them. As early as 1911 Ploetz, Lenz, and a physician named Arthur Wollny founded a secret "Nordic Ring" within the society whose aim was the improvement of the Nordic race. As an unpublished pamphlet entitled "Unser Weg" (Our way) points out, Ploetz and his sympathizers in the Nordic

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 57, 247. Information pertaining to Lenz's party affiliation was found in the questionnaire administered to all state employees in 1933 in his Personalakt, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich, MK 35575.

⁷⁴ Schallmayer, *Vererbung und Auslese*, 2nd ed. (1910) (cit. n. 35), p. 352.

⁷⁵ Baur et al., *Grundriß* (cit. n. 68), Vol. II, p. 162.

⁷⁶ Fritz Lenz, "Zum Begriff der Rassenhygiene und seiner Benennung," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1915, 11:445–448; Baur et al., *Grundriß*, Vol. II, pp. 161–162, on p. 162.

Ring harbored plans for a "Nordic-Germanic race hygiene"—if only as a part of a much broader eugenics program—that would direct its attention to saving the Nordic elements in Western civilization. In addition, the same individuals helped establish other similar, though not secret, *völkisch* organizations, including the little known and insignificant Bogenklub (1912) and, after the war, the Deutsche Widar-Bund (1919).⁷⁷

The tensions over the race question, while visible during the Empire, were exacerbated by the increased political polarization of Germany following the German revolution and the founding of the Republic. Formerly the seat of Prussian conservatism, Berlin acquired a decidedly pinkish hue during Weimar. Indeed, of all the German states, Prussia became the Republic's staunchest defender. On the other hand, Bavaria—and, in particular, Munich—became a hotbed of political reaction following the collapse of the much feared and hated Munich Soviet Republic of 1919. Not only was Munich the major center of right-wing paramilitary organizations like the Freikorps, but it was also home to the then tiny National Socialist Party. In general the political divisions between Berlin and Munich were reflected in the two major chapters of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene. During the Republic the Berlin chapter was the largest in the society and was sympathetic to the new order; although it undoubtedly had conservative members—some even with a *völkisch* outlook—on the whole it maintained a predominantly centrist–social democratic orientation and rejected as unscientific and politically dangerous any notion of an Aryan eugenics. The Munich chapter tended to be both more right-wing and more open to racist views, although there is no reason to believe that all of the members shared Lenz's blatantly pro-Nordic position.

Yet despite these political and intellectual differences, the Deutsche Gesellschaft never split during Weimar, as has been wrongly suggested by one article on the history of German eugenics.⁷⁸ As a result of a general meeting of the society held in Munich in 1922, the headquarters of the Deutsche Gesellschaft was transferred from Munich to Berlin. During the next few years the decentralized society continued as before—as a collection of relatively autonomous local chapters. As under the Empire, those wishing to join the society during the Weimar years had to join a particular chapter; one could not simply be a member at large. Sometime between 1922 and 1924 the Berlin-based Association of German Registry Officials, a group of six thousand civil servants involved in registering births, marriages, and deaths, became interested in the ideals popularized by the society. Apparently at the instigation of the association, the Deutscher Bund für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde, an organization dedicated to spreading eugenic ideas to all Germans, including the working class, was formed in Berlin in 1926. The neutral term *Volksaufartung* (national regeneration) was chosen to make plain its nonracist stance. With approximately 1,500 members, the Bund saw itself as a daughter organization of the society, although its left-of-center political orientation and its opposition to racist sentiment made it much more sympathetic to the Berlin chapter than to the one in Munich. The chairman of the Bund was the physician, eugenicist, and high-ranking government official Karl von Behr-Pinnow.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Alfred Ploetz, "Unser Weg," 1911 (pamphlet, Ploetz family archive), p. 2; and Doeke, *Alfred Ploetz* (cit. n. 2), p. 46.

⁷⁸ Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im dritten Reich" (cit. n. 2), p. 117.

⁷⁹ Karl von Behr-Pinnow, "Jahresversammlung des Bundes für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde am

It is not clear exactly why the Bund was formed. While the pro-Aryan sympathies that alienated non-Aryanists in the society may have also contributed to the creation of the Bund, there was undoubtedly a more important reason for its foundation. As was mentioned earlier, the Deutsche Gesellschaft made virtually no effort to reach out to all classes in society. Its rhetoric notwithstanding, the society had done little beyond attracting a relatively small number of medical professionals and academics to the movement; indeed, during the early 1920s it probably did not have more than a thousand members. It seems as if the leadership of the society did not quite know how to draw large numbers to their fold without compromising their "scientific integrity." The civil servants who formed the Bund, on the other hand, wanted first and foremost to popularize eugenics—to bring the problem of degeneration and the possibility of "national regeneration" to the awareness of the largest number of people possible. Although not without class prejudices, those involved in the Bund were at once less elitist in their view of the hereditary fitness of the working classes and more willing to write in a style that all Germans could understand. This is especially evident in the Bund's journals, the *Zeitschrift für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde* (1926–1927) and its successor, *Volksaufartung, Erblehre, Eheberatung* (1928–1930). Edited by a high-ranking public health official in the Prussian Ministry of Welfare, Artur Ostermann, the two journals published short, nontechnical articles that were decidedly different in style and tone from those found in the *Archiv*. Besides its popular style the Bund had something else the society lacked: real influence in government circles. Members of the society had direct links to the Association of German Registry Officials and close ties with the German Ministry of Welfare, the German Ministry of the Interior, and the Prussian Ministry of Welfare. All of these agencies contributed money to the Bund and its journals.⁸⁰

Though lacking technical, scientific articles, the *Zeitschrift* and *Volksaufartung* voiced many of the same concerns as the older and more established *Archiv*. Both publications continued to warn about the dangers of birthrate decline and the tendency of the fitter classes to have fewer children; both also lamented the slow progress made in bringing genetics and eugenics into the high school classroom.⁸¹ Yet if there was overlap, there were also important differences in the two eugenics journals. While carrying racist articles only infrequently, the *Archiv* devoted space to reviews (often written by Lenz) of blatantly racist publications; the two Bund publications were free of pro-Aryan and anti-Semitic sentiment. Perhaps more importantly, however, the Berlin journals saw as one of

7. Mai," *Zeitschrift für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde*, 1927, 2:57–58. On these developments in general see Otto Krohne, "Position of Eugenics in Germany," *Eugenics Review*, 1925–1926, 17:143–146, on p. 144.

⁸⁰ Fritz Lenz, "Ein 'Deutscher Bund für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde,'" *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1925, 17:349–350; and von Behr-Pinnow, "Jahresversammlung," p. 58.

⁸¹ Regarding population policy see, e.g., Fritz Lenz, "Kinderreichtum und Rassenhygiene," *Z. Volks. Erbk.*, 1927, 2:104–105; Lenz, "Die bevölkerungspolitische Lage und das Gebot der Stunde," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1929, 21:241–253; Hermann Muckermann, "Differenzierte Fortpflanzung," *ibid.*, 1930, 24:269–289; Fritz Brüggemann, "Bevölkerungspolitische Probleme," *Z. Volks. Erbk.*, 1927, 2:18–19; Isch, "Ist Geburtensteigerung bei den Intellektuellen möglich?" *ibid.*, pp. 141–142; and Friedrich Burgdörfer, "Eugenik und Bevölkerungspolitik," *Volksaufartung, Erblehre, Eheberatung*, 1928, 3:248–262. With respect to the teaching of genetics and eugenics see Spiler, "Vererbungslehre und Rassenhygiene im biologischen Unterricht der höheren Schulen," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1927, 19:63–69; and Karl von Behr-Pinnow, "Vererbungslehre und Eugenik in den Schulen," *Volks. Erb. Ehe.*, 1928, 3:73–80.

their major missions the popularization of Prussia's recently instituted *Eheberatungstellen* (marriage counseling centers). Created by a 1926 decree of the Prussian Ministry of Welfare, these centers may have been a concession to those eugenicists and government health officials who had pleaded, without success, for a compulsory exchange of health certificates for couples prior to marriage. Although launched with good intentions, the more than one hundred *Eheberatungstellen* were plagued from the beginning by a shortage of funding and the lack of a unified purpose. Established primarily for genetic counseling, they were not heavily frequented by prospective couples. The Dresden marriage counseling center, the oldest in Germany, had only sixty-four customers between 1911 and 1915.⁸²

The attempt to popularize eugenics during the Weimar period was also accompanied by substantial institutional expansion. Before 1920 Germany lacked any institutional center for eugenics and could boast only a few isolated university courses in race hygiene. In 1923 a university chair for race hygiene (held by Lenz) was founded in Munich, and by 1932 over forty eugenics lecture courses were given at various German universities—many, if not all, in faculties of medicine. Two research centers were also established. The German Research Institute for Psychiatry was founded in Munich in 1918 and, with funding and aid from the Rockefeller Foundation, was made a Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in 1924. It was directed by Rüdin after 1931. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Berlin was founded in 1927 and directed by Eugen Fischer.⁸³

In addition, the movement was becoming increasingly visible both at home and abroad. In 1926, at the Great Exhibition for Health Care, Social Welfare, and Physical Training held in Düsseldorf, several members of the executive committee of the Deutsche Gesellschaft chose the exhibits for health care. Two years later, Munich was to host the International Alliance of Eugenic Organizations, at which time the German eugenicists' foreign colleagues had the opportunity to visit Ploetz's private research laboratory at Herrsching and were given a guided tour of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry headed by Rüdin.⁸⁴

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s the society also continued to grow, reaching a membership of nearly 1,100 by 1931. At a national meeting of the Deutsche Gesellschaft in Munich on 18 September 1931, it merged with the Deutscher Bund für Volksaufartung. The name was changed to the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (Eugenik)—the word *Eugenik* was included to demonstrate that the term *Rassenhygiene* was merely its German equivalent. The executive committee was strengthened and given more power, a change that resulted in the Deutsche Gesellschaft becoming more centralized than it had previously been. In addition, members could now join at large.⁸⁵

⁸² Artur Ostermann, "Eheberatungstellen," *Volks. Erb. Ehe.*, 1928, 3:293–298, on p. 295; and F. K. Scheumann, "Sinn und Wesen der Eheberatung," *ibid.*, pp. 19–22, on p. 22.

⁸³ Maria Günther, *Die Institutionalisierung der Rassenhygiene an den deutschen Hochschulen vor 1933*, med. Diss., Mainz, 1982 (Mainz: privately printed, 1982), p. 61; and "Ein deutsches Forschungsinstitut für Anthropologie, menschliche Erblehre und Eugenik," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1927, 19:457–458.

⁸⁴ Hans-Peter Kröner, "Die Eugenik in Deutschland von 1891 bis 1934," med. Diss., Münster, 1980, pp. 84–85.

⁸⁵ Hermann Muckermann, "Aus der Hauptversammlung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (Eugenik) zu München am 18. September 1931," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 26:94–101, on pp. 94–95; Kröner, "Eugenik in Deutschland," p. 87.

The net effect of these changes was to create a larger, more popular, and more influential society that, as Hermann Muckermann put it, was true to "the historical line" of the movement. For Muckermann, a former Jesuit active in the Berlin chapter of the Deutsche Gesellschaft and a zealous popularizer of race hygiene during Weimar, that meant a non-Aryan-supremacist eugenics movement. Although Lenz, Rüdin, Ploetz, and a handful of others certainly never gave up their pro-Aryan sentiment, they were willing to put that in the background in the interest of a unified movement. Ironically, their influence over the movement was never weaker than it was at the end of Weimar—at a time when the Nazis were gaining strength daily. Despite the fact that the Munich chapter contained many of the prominent leaders of the Deutsche Gesellschaft, it did not grow to the same extent as the Berlin chapter; indeed, by 1931 even the Stuttgart chapter was larger. Nearly all of the numerous new local chapters that sprang up during the late Weimar years employed the term *Eugenik* rather than *Rassenhygiene* in their names, largely owing to the influence of Muckermann.⁸⁶ Had the Nazis not forced a drastic change in course in 1933, there is every reason to believe that the movement would have become even more similar to its counterpart in Britain.

Depression and Sterilization

The depression that began in 1929 not only eventually made more than six million people unemployed, but also forced a reexamination of the continued expansion of the welfare state. Calls were heard from industrial circles to trim Germany's welfare budget; "social policy must be limited by the productivity of the economy," it was argued. Although such cries lamenting Germany's economic inefficiency and high welfare costs were not new, they were taken quite seriously by the half-dictatorial, half-parliamentary government of Heinrich Brüning (1930–1932). By 1931 Germany's *Sozialpolitik* had become, at least in the eyes of some, too high "an insurance premium against Bolshevism."⁸⁷

The critique of burgeoning social costs and the desire, even on the part of left-wing politicians, to allocate Germany's dwindling resources in the most cost-effective manner possible did not go unnoticed by race hygienists. This is clearly visible in the more substantial journal *Eugenik*, which superseded the earlier Bund publications in 1930. Edited, like its predecessors, by Ostermann and boasting a circulation of over five thousand, it included both racist society members (Lenz and Rüdin) and non-Aryanists (Muckermann) on its editorial board. It was not formally affiliated with the Bund.⁸⁸ Although never as well known internationally as the Archiv, *Eugenik* expressed the trends of the movement during Weimar's financially and politically troubled final years.

One concern mirrored in the journal was the problem of crime.⁸⁹ If much of

⁸⁶ Hermann Muckermann, "Hauptversammlung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (Eugenik), München, 18. September 1931," *Eugenik*, 1931, 2:47–48.

⁸⁷ David Abraham, "Corporatist Compromise and the Re-emergence of the Labor/Capital Conflict in Weimar Germany," *Political Power and Social Theory*, 1981, 2:59–109, on p. 84.

⁸⁸ Fritz Lenz, "Eugenik, Erblehre, Erbpflge," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1931, 23:451–452; Hermann Muckermann, "Aus der Hauptversammlung" (cit. n. 85), p. 99.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Dr. Finke, "Biologische Aufgaben in der Kriminalpolitik," *Eugenik*, 1930, 1:55–58; Johannes Lange, "Verbrechen und Vererbung," *ibid.*, 1931, 1:165–173; and Hermann Muckermann, "Eugenik und Strafrecht," *ibid.*, 1932, 2:104–109.

Germany's growing crime problem was a manifestation of bad germ plasm, then the millions spent yearly to detain criminals could be saved through an active race hygiene policy. In addition, *Eugenik* carried numerous articles that sought to demonstrate that eugenics was one of the best ways of eliminating waste in the welfare budget. According to one report, entitled "Marriage Counseling and Social Insurance," if more people had used the marriage counseling centers, Germany's hereditary defectives—who allegedly accounted for between eight and ten percent of all those between the ages of sixteen and forty-five—would not constitute such a "heavy burden on our expenditures." More explicit was a statement made by Muckermann in an article on welfare and eugenics. Complaining that 3.45 marks was needed daily to support one institutionalized mental defective, and pointing out that this saddled Germany with a financial burden of over 185 million marks a year at a time when there was barely enough money to keep healthy individuals from starving, Muckermann presented his readers with a sensible solution to the problem of the Reich's overtaxed social net:

If one compares the money given out for defectives with the amount which a healthy family has at its disposal, one quickly comes to the conclusion that in the future everything must be done to reduce the number of hereditarily diseased individuals—a task that can be achieved by means of eugenics. Besides that, a clear differentiation must be made in the entire welfare system such that the means available are first appropriated for preventive care, and only then given out to people who cannot be brought back to work and life.⁹⁰

Of course Muckermann never suggested that Germany's nonproductive elements should be treated in an inhumane fashion, but in hard economic times they would become second-class citizens who would receive from the state only the minimum required to maintain their existence.

Muckermann's cost-benefit analysis reflected Weimar Germany's preoccupation with rationalization and economic efficiency. During the 1920s industrialists sought ways to make Germany competitive on the world market—ways that included the elimination of inefficient facilities, the introduction of better methods of cost accounting and administration, the reorganization of factory work along the lines advocated by Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor, and the amalgamation of operations and firms into more efficient corporations and cartels.⁹¹ Although not connected to the industrialists introducing such innovations, eugenicists nonetheless saw the relationship between race hygiene and the various forms of rationalization. As one eugenics supporter succinctly put it:

We can protect our position in the world and ensure a high level of culture for our people only through a wise human economy (*weise Menschenökonomie*). Its goal must be an increase in those capabilities of the people who create a larger living space—that is, we must strengthen with respect to procreation, education and employment all those who achieve high quality manual and intellectual work. . . . At the same time it is absolutely essential . . . to limit the number of those who consume

⁹⁰ "Eheberatung und Sozialversicherung," *Eugenik*, 1930, 1:182; and Hermann Muckermann, "Illustrationen zu der Frage: Wohlfahrtspflege und Eugenik," *ibid.*, 1931, 2:41–42, on p. 42.

⁹¹ Robert A. Brady, *The Rationalization Movement in German Industry* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1933).

more than they produce, who make the struggle for survival of our people difficult, and who depress [the people's] standard of living.⁹²

Thus people became a manipulable resource to be administered in the interest of a healthy and culturally productive nation.

Perhaps nowhere, however, was the true nature of race hygiene better depicted than in the preface to *Eugenik*:

Civilization has eliminated natural selection. Public welfare and social assistance contribute, as an undesired side effect of a necessary duty, to the preservation and further reproduction of hereditarily diseased individuals. A crushing and ever-growing burden of useless individuals unworthy of life are maintained and taken care of in institutions at the expense of the healthy—of whom a hundred thousand are today without their own place to live and millions of whom starve from lack of work. Does not today's predicament cry out strongly enough for a "planned economy," i.e., eugenics, in health policy?⁹³

The devastating financial crisis of the late Weimar period only brought to the fore the logic implicit in eugenics from its very inception: it was a strategy to manage national efficiency rationally in order to preserve Germany's and the West's political and cultural hegemony.

The need to cut welfare costs, together with the constant pressure exerted by Ostermann, Muckermann, and others with influence, finally forced the Prussian government to take action. On 20 January 1932 the Prussian Upper House received and approved a resolution by one of its representatives, a Dr. Struve, to recognize eugenics and popularize it in every way possible and to decrease immediately the amount of money given out for the care of the defective to "a level that can be supported by a completely impoverished people." On 2 July, the Committee for Population Policy and Eugenics of the Prussian Health Council heard talks by Muckermann and three others on the topic of "Eugenics in the Service of National Welfare" and consequently adopted several eugenic proposals, including a draft for a sterilization law.⁹⁴

The drafting of a sterilization law in Germany was a long time coming. Prominent eugenicists had carefully monitored events in the United States, where sterilization was legally practiced after 1907. During the Empire leading members of the Deutsche Gesellschaft did not push even for the voluntary sterilization of hereditary defectives, largely because they were certain that the country would find such a practice abhorrent. By the early Weimar years, however, their attitude had changed. Although by and large still opposed to mandatory sterilization, most members of the Deutsche Gesellschaft were open to voluntary sterilization; however, they still seemed to place more emphasis on institutionalization and work colonies as a means of preventing the unfit from reproducing.⁹⁵ During the 1920s a few obscure physicians did exploit the ambiguities in paragraph 224 of the Reich's legal code in order to carry out sterilizations on eugenic grounds.

⁹² W. F. Winkler, "Bevölkerungspolitische Zukunftsfragen Europas," *Volks. Erb. Ehe.*, 1928, 3:169–173, on p. 173.

⁹³ "Geleitwort," *Eugenik*, 1930, 1:n.p.

⁹⁴ The resolution was cited in *Eugenik*, 1931–1932, 2:109; see also "Eugenische Tagung des preussischen Landesgesundheitsrates," *Eugenik*, 1931–1932, 2:187–189.

⁹⁵ "Aus der rassenhygienischen Bewegung," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1922, 14:374.

One doctor, Gerhart Boeters, not only bragged about the sixty-three sterilizations he had performed but also sought to encourage other physicians, as custodians of the nation's health, to do likewise.⁹⁶ Although Boeters would later lose his civil service position as district physician in Saxony as a result of his boldness, his pleas—published in many of Germany's leading medical journals—ensured that the issue would be discussed. After prolonged debate among members in the Deutsche Gesellschaft and the medical community, in 1932 the Prussian Health Council drafted a sterilization law that permitted the *voluntary* sterilization of certain classes of hereditarily defective individuals and required that proof be given that the defective traits were in fact genetic. There was no mention of sterilization on either racial or social grounds. In addition, the committee that proposed the bill rejected out of hand the use of euthanasia for eugenic purposes.⁹⁷

These proposals were embraced by several medical organizations both inside and outside of Prussia just weeks before the National Socialist takeover in 1933. In general physicians responded positively to the proposed law. Even in Protestant church circles the bill had its supporters. Only the Catholic Church, following the 1930 papal encyclical "Casti conubii," condemned the practice of sterilization.⁹⁸ However, owing to the political chaos following the deposition of the Prussian government by the Reich in July 1932, the sterilization draft never became law under the Republic, although it would later serve as the basis of the Nazi mandatory sterilization law of July 1933.

Thus throughout the Weimar years, as during the Empire, the movement was concerned first and foremost with boosting Germany's national efficiency and cultural productivity. Despite ideological differences among its advocates, race hygiene appealed to Aryan supremacists and their critics alike as a scientific means of solving social problems. Especially during the last troubled years of the Republic, more and more people of all political persuasions turned to the new discipline as one of the only effective ways of reducing the welfare budget and ensuring that Germany maintain its rightful position among the "cultured nations." Late Weimar eugenics expressed even more clearly the managerial logic implicit in German eugenics from its earliest days: population could and should be scientifically manipulated in the interest of power.

EUGENICS UNDER THE SWASTIKA, 1933–1945

Although the Weimar years witnessed the gradual adoption of a "eugenic outlook" on the part of certain government officials, prior to 1933 the cause of race

⁹⁶ Joachim Müller, "Sterilisation und Gesetzgebung bis 1933" (paper delivered at the Institute for the History of Medicine, Mainz, 7 Nov. 1978), pp. 14–16.

⁹⁷ "Eugenische Tagung" (cit. n. 94), p. 187. During the 1920s Germany witnessed a medical and legal discussion over "euthanasia"; Karl Heinz Hafner and Rolf Winau, "Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens": Eine Untersuchung zu der Schrift von Karl Binding und Alfred Hoche," *Medizinhist. J.*, 1974, 9:227–254.

⁹⁸ Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im dritten Reich" (cit. n. 2), p. 120; and Gerhard Baader, "Das 'Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses'—Versuch einer kritischen Deutung," in *Zusammenhang: Festschrift für Marielene Putscher*, ed. Otto Baur and Otto Glandien (Cologne: Wienand, 1984), p. 869. For a detailed discussion of the attitudes of the Catholic and Protestant churches to the 1932 sterilization bill see Kurt Nowak, "Euthanasie" und Sterilisierung im dritten Reich: *Die Konfrontation der evangelischen und katholischen Kirche mit dem "Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses" und der "Euthanasie"-Aktion* (3rd ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

hygiene was advanced by a relatively small group of intellectuals, primarily medically trained professionals, within the confines of the Deutsche Gesellschaft. The Nazi seizure of power changed this drastically. Now heading the Reich was a man for whom race hygiene represented a key element in a much larger "biological" and racial world view—a world view to which the entire nation would be pledged and ultimately sacrificed. Hitler's maniacal obsession with the Aryan race as the motive force of world history assured that anything useful to the preservation of "Nordic blood" would become a cornerstone of national policy and the subject of intense government propaganda. Because much of National Socialist ideology, as one Bavarian Nazi succinctly put it, was in some sense little more than "applied biology,"⁹⁹ it becomes extremely difficult, after 1933, to separate the goals and activities of "professional eugenicists" from the rhetoric and racial policies of Hitler and high-ranking Nazi Party members. For our purposes, however, Nazi "race hygiene" will be defined as the activities of professional eugenicists, the Deutsche Gesellschaft, and the two major eugenics institutes during the twelve-year dictatorship. But no examination of eugenics in the Third Reich can neglect the legacy of the pre-1933 movement, nor can it ignore the connection between race hygiene and such Nazi racial policies as the "euthanasia" program, the extermination of Europe's gypsy population, and the "final solution." Although none of the latter were viewed by Germany's professional eugenicists as belonging to the province of race hygiene, in at least some instances there were both personal and ideological ties between the two.

"*Gleichschaltung*" and Change

The new political leadership imposed significant changes upon the race hygiene movement. Not long after the triumph of the new order the Deutsche Gesellschaft, like all other organizations in the Reich, was *gleichgeschaltet* (coordinated) and subjected to the "Führer principle." This meant, first of all, that the society was no longer an independent organization. It was placed under a special Reich Commission for National Health Service, which in turn was directly subordinate to the Reich Ministry of Interior. Accordingly, the society was expected to "support the government in the fulfillment of its race hygienic goals." In addition to becoming a de facto government body, the society lost all semblance of democratic control. In November 1933 Rüdin, director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry in Munich, was appointed *Reichkommissar* of the society by Nazi Minister of Interior Wilhelm Frick. He, in turn, was in charge of appointing the business manager as well as the leaders of all the local chapters of the society. Final authority, however, remained in the hands of Frick. The minister of interior could veto all appointments, had to approve any changes in the society's bylaws, and could remove anyone from office at will.¹⁰⁰

Even before the new statutes were drawn up early in 1934, Rüdin eliminated the word *Eugenik* from the society's official name and reinstated the one used before the compromise of 1931, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Robert Proctor, "Pawns or Pioneers? The Role of Doctors in the Origins of Nazi Racial Science" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard Univ., 1982), p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, e.V.," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1934, 28:104–108; and Kröner, "Eugenik in Deutschland" (cit. n. 84), pp. 92–93.

¹⁰¹ "Notizen," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1933, 27:467.

Unlike the previous name change, this one had more than merely symbolic significance. The Nazi seizure of power eliminated the possibility of a non-Aryanist race hygiene in Germany. Since the Deutsche Gesellschaft was now virtually a government organ, and since race hygiene was central to the new order, there could be little if any deviation from the official line. This meant the end of the "Berlin interpretation" of eugenics—an interpretation that appeared to have won the upper hand at the end of the Weimar period. Two of the most influential relatively nonracist eugenicists, Ostermann and Muckermann (the Social Democrat Grotjahn had died in 1931), were removed from their offices and forced into retirement. After 1937 Muckermann was prohibited from writing on the subject of eugenics.¹⁰² With the removal of Muckermann, the movement lost its best popularizer as well as the director of the Eugenics Division of the Berlin Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics. These two men were not the only sacrifices of the new regime. Although membership lists for the Deutsche Gesellschaft are not available for the late Weimar and early Nazi years, it can be safely assumed that many of the less prominent critics of the racists left the society of their own accord or were urged to do so by the newly appointed local chapter leaders. It goes without saying that Jewish members, such as the geneticist Richard Goldschmidt, were forced out of the organization; according to the new 1934 statutes, membership in the Deutsche Gesellschaft was restricted to "Germans of Aryan ancestry."¹⁰³

Hand in hand with the elimination of relatively nonracist eugenics and its supporters from the newly "coordinated" Deutsche Gesellschaft came a greater preoccupation with race. In the past not even Aryan sympathizers like Lenz, Ploetz, and Rüdin had made *Aufnorderung* (nordification) a cornerstone of their eugenics policy, nor had they publicly suggested that the preservation and racial purification of the "Aryan" population of the Reich should become a primary focus of their attention. After 1933 race hygiene combined *Rassenpflege* (racial care) and *Erbpflege* (genetic care).¹⁰⁴ The latter component was equivalent to the old, relatively nonracist meritocratic eugenics concerned with the rational management of those mental and physical traits of the population seen as favorable to a more culturally and economically productive Reich. *Rassenpflege* (the management of a population's racial traits) was something new, although Lenz as well as "racial scientists" (racist anthropologists) such as Hans F. K. Günther had earlier suggested that high economic and cultural achievement was a product of certain superior races.

This new blatantly racist (and sometimes explicitly anti-Semitic) line was given clear expression by Germany's race hygienists both in public speeches and in their writings. In an address presented at a special meeting of the Deutsche Gesellschaft in 1934, Rüdin stressed the cultural importance of "the Nordic race in

¹⁰² Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im dritten Reich" (cit. n. 2), p. 123; and Hans Ebert, "Hermann Muckermann: Profil eines Theologen, Widerstandskämpfers und Hochschullehrers der Technischen Universität Berlin," *Humanismus und Technik*, 1976, 20:29–40, on p. 35.

¹⁰³ Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics" (cit. n. 2), pp. 309, 315 (quotation); and "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, e.V." (cit. n. 100), p. 107.

¹⁰⁴ Otto Freiherr von Verschuer, *Leitfaden der Rassenhygiene* (Leipzig: Georg Thieme, 1941), p. 125; and Arthur Gütt, "Ausmerze und Lebensauslese in ihre Bedeutung für Erbgesundheit und Rassenpflege," in *Erblehre und Rassenhygiene im völkischen Staat*, ed. Ernst Rüdin (Munich: Lehmann, 1934), p. 118.

world history and especially German history” and concluded that as such it “urgently deserves to be preserved and protected.” Although he denied that the goal of preserving and protecting Germany’s Nordic and closely related stock meant a devaluation of other races, Rüdin rejected out of hand the crossing of “dissimilar races.” In his influential *Leitfaden der Rassenhygiene* (Textbook of race hygiene) (1941), Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer (1896–1969), director of the Frankfurt University Institute for Heredity and Race Hygiene, and later director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, discussed the necessity of preserving the “racial peculiarities of the *Volk*” by combating “the penetration of foreign races.”¹⁰⁵ Similar statements are found in the writings of other Nazi race hygienists such as Theodor Mollison, Otto Reche, and Martin Staemmler.

Continuities

Yet despite the important changes that the eugenics movement underwent during the Third Reich, there was at least as much continuity as discontinuity. The new preoccupation with race after 1933 in no way lessened the attention devoted to the more traditional concerns of race hygiene (e.g., increasing the birthrate of the “fitter” classes of society, reducing the number of nonproductive elements). Indeed, judging from the plethora of books on the subject, the obsession with reducing the number of the unfit and boosting the ranks of the productive classes through the implementation of a vigorous race hygiene program was far greater than it had been even in the Weimar years. Popular works such as Otto Helmut’s *Volk in Gefahr* (Nation in danger), which sold over 26,000 copies, and Friedrich Burgdörfer’s *Völker am Abgrund* (Peoples at the abyss) did not focus their attention on “the Jewish menace” but rather used numerous graphs and diagrams to reiterate such longstanding eugenic concerns as the “hereditary defectives’ burden on the German people,” “the threat of the subhumans [criminals],” and “the decline of the fit, the increase of the unfit.” In one diagram entitled “Fertility and Race,” Helmut did not compare Aryans and Jews but rather tried to demonstrate the alleged Slavic threat facing Germany—the same fear articulated by Schallmayer and others before and during World War I.¹⁰⁶

This continuation of earlier themes is found in statements from those outside the movement as well. In an address given in 1933 to the newly instituted Expert Commission for Population and Racial Policy, a committee set up by the Nazi government to deal with various “racial questions,” Interior Minister Frick asserted that “in order to raise the number of genetically healthy progeny, we must first lower the money spent on asocial individuals, the unfit, and the hopelessly hereditarily diseased, and we must prevent the procreation of severely hereditarily defective people.” In a short article published the same year, the physician Friedrich Maier urged his readership to replace the system of “welfare, which generally served only the weakest and asocial individuals,” with one emphasizing

¹⁰⁵ Ernst Rüdin, “Aufgabe und Ziele der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1934, 28:228–233, on p. 232 (quotation); see also Kröner, “Eugenik in Deutschland” (cit. n. 84), p. 94; and Verschuer, *Leitfaden*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶ Friedrich Burgdörfer, *Völker am Abgrund* (Munich: Lehmann, 1936); and Otto Helmut, *Volk in Gefahr: Der Geburtenrückgang und seine Folgen für Deutschlands Zukunft* (Munich: Lehmann, 1934), pp. 26, 28, 30, 34 (diagram).

¹⁰⁷ “Ansprache des Herrn Reichministers des Innern Dr. Wilhelm Frick auf der ersten Sitzung des

the "management of the health of those portions of the German nation still racially intact in order both to prevent genetically diseased offspring, and to encourage the hereditarily fit individuals in all segments of the population."¹⁰⁷ Thus, although Schallmayer and other relative nonracists would have viewed the racist and anti-Semitic side of eugenics during the Third Reich as deplorable and "unscientific," they would not have found all parts of Nazi race hygiene objectionable; its logic and many of its aims were too similar to their own.

Of all the various strategies and programs implemented by the Nazis in the interest of improving the racial substrate of the Reich, none reveals the continuity between pre- and post-1933 race hygiene better than the sterilization law. Formally enacted on 14 July 1933, the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (Law for the prevention of genetically diseased offspring) was based on the 1932 Prussian proposal initiated by Muckermann, Ostermann and others, including the then director of the Berlin-based Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Biology, Richard Goldschmidt.¹⁰⁸ Unlike the failed Prussian proposal of 1932, however, the Nazi law allowed the mandatory sterilization of those individuals who, in the opinion of an *Erbgesundheitsgericht* (genetics health court), were afflicted with congenital feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic depressive insanity, genetic epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, genetic blindness, and genetic deafness. Those suffering from "serious alcoholism" could also be sterilized against their will. The *Gesetz* made no provisions for sterilization based on racial grounds.

Although Ernst Rüdin collaborated in the law's well-publicized interpretative commentary, it is not clear what role, if any, Germany's "professional eugenicists" had in drafting it. The initial impetus for the *Gesetz* came from the director of the Commission of National Health Service, Arthur Gütt.¹⁰⁹ As members of the Expert Committee, Lenz, Ploetz, and Rüdin may merely have enjoyed the function of "rubber-stamping" a proposal originated by the Ministry of Interior. Nonetheless they wholeheartedly approved the new measure. Like other members of the medical community, they had good reason to do so. The statutes called for the establishment of genetic health courts and supreme genetic health courts to adjudicate the *Gesetz*, all of which were presided over by a lawyer and two doctors. The *Gesetz* stipulated that one physician be an expert in the field of heredity and that the second be employed by the state. Moreover, since physicians were required to report all individuals afflicted by any genetic illness mentioned above, they were the ones most often responsible for bringing cases to the attention of the courts. Hence most of Germany's physicians were now afforded ample opportunity to fulfill their obligation as custodians of the nation's health, either directly, through their involvement on the courts, or indirectly, by ensuring that the genetically ill were registered with the courts.¹¹⁰

Although initially some 1,700 genetic health courts were envisioned by the Nazis (one in each large city and in each county), probably not more than two to

Sachverständigenbeirats für Bevölkerungs- und Rassenpolitik," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1933, 27:412-419, on p. 416; and Friedrich Maier, "Die neue Staatsmedizinische Akademie in München," *ibid.*, 1934, 28:56-57.

¹⁰⁸ Bock, *Zwangssterilisation* (cit. n. 2), pp. 80-84; Lilienthal, "Rassenhygiene im dritten Reich" (cit. n. 2), p. 124; and Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Bock, *Zwangssterilisation*, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ "Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses," *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1933, 27:420-423; and Proctor, "Pawns or Pioneers" (cit. n. 99), p. 47.

three hundred were ever established. It thus proved to be impossible to extend the *Gesetz* to cover an even broader group of “defectives”—something that at least some eugenicists desired. Hence, Rüdín’s plea that all “burdensome lives, ethically defective and socially unfit psychopaths, and the huge army of confirmed hereditary criminals” come under the surgeon’s knife went largely unanswered.¹¹¹

Lenz also believed that the *Gesetz* was too narrow. He spoke of the desirability of sterilizing 1 million feeble-minded, 1 million mentally ill, and 170,000 idiots in “the social interest.” He at least half-seriously suggested that it would be better if the bottom one third of the entire population did not reproduce.¹¹² Nonetheless, estimates on the number of people sterilized between 1934 and 1939 range from 200,000–350,000 to 350,000–400,000. All had passed through the genetic courts, and the overwhelming majority of them were sterilized against their will. It is estimated that slightly more than half of all operations were performed on the so-called feeble-minded. During the first three years of the *Gesetz*, at least 367 women and 70 men died owing to complications following the procedure. The number of related deaths throughout the six-year period was probably much higher.¹¹³

During the Nazi period, the research conducted in Germany’s academic institutes associated with eugenics was similar to investigations carried out during the Weimar period. In the German Research Institute for Psychiatry in Munich, the heavy emphasis placed on twin studies as a means of investigating the inheritance of mental disorders continued during the Third Reich much as it had during the Weimar years. Formed in the hope that the research undertaken would one day help reduce the enormous financial cost of caring for the army of mental defectives, by 1938 the institute had at least eleven researchers working on material collected from over 9,000 identical and fraternal twins. Although we do not know whether these researchers were also involved in providing genealogies for individuals whose pure “Aryan lineage” was in question, like their counterparts in the Berlin institute, the major task of Rüdín’s institute was to provide the hard evidence for the inheritance of pathological mental traits to aid the government’s effort to sterilize the “unfit.” However, the institute also made a contribution to positive eugenics by studying genealogies of talented individuals; these included shop foremen and their spouses—who were undoubtedly seen as a group of elite workers who rose to low-level managerial positions owing to their genetically endowed abilities.¹¹⁴ The backgrounds and exact number of researchers in the institute and the precise nature of the investigations carried out between 1933 and 1945 remain unknown.

Far eclipsing the Munich institute in importance, Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm In-

¹¹¹ Proctor, “Pawns or Pioneers,” p. 47; Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), p. 35.

¹¹² Hans-Ulrich Brändle, “Aufartung und Ausmerze,” in *Volk und Gesundheit. Heilen und Verichten im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Projektgruppe “Volk und Gesundheit” (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1982), p. 167n7.

¹¹³ Baader, “Das ‘Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses’ ” (cit. n. 98), p. 865; Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), pp. 36, 37; Bock, *Zwangssterilisation* (cit. n. 2), pp. 237–238.

¹¹⁴ Max Planck, ed., *25 Jahre Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften* (Berlin, 1936), Vol. I, pp. 131–132; and Ernst Rüdín, “20 Jahre menschliche Erbforschung an der Deutschen Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie in München, Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut,” *Arch. Ras. Ges.-Biol.*, 1938, 32:193–203, on p. 195, 198.

Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses

vom 14. Juli 1933

mit Auszug aus dem Gesetz gegen gefährliche Gewohnheitsverbrecher
und über Maßregeln der Sicherung und Besserung vom 24. Nov. 1933

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Mit Beiträgen:

**Die Eingriffe zur Unfruchtbarmachung des Mannes
und zur Entmannung**

von Geheimrat Prof. Dr. med. Erich Leyer, München

Die Eingriffe zur Unfruchtbarmachung der Frau

von Geheimrat Prof. Dr. med. Albert Döderlein, München

Mit 15 zum Teil farbigen Abbildungen



J. F. Lehmanns Verlag / München 1934

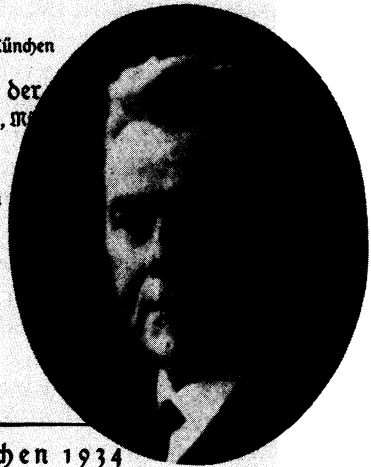


Figure 1. Title page of the published version of the Nazi sterilization law, the Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses, issued under the authorship of Arthur Gütt (director of the Commission of National Health Service), Ernst Rüdin, and Falk Ruttke (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1934). Insert: Ernst Rüdin, from an advertisement for the Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift.

stitute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics remained the institutional center of German race hygiene research throughout the Nazi period. It officially opened on 15 September 1927—a date chosen to coincide with Germany's hosting of the Fifth International Congress of Genetics in Berlin. From its

very inception the institute represented "the wish of German anthropologists and race hygienists for a central research institute for their disciplines in the Reich." Eugen Fischer, a prominent Freiburg racist eugenicist whose anthropological investigations into the "Reheboth bastards" (mulattos) of Southwest Africa in 1908 launched his academic career, was chosen to head the Berlin institute as well as its anthropological division. In 1933 he was also appointed rector of the University of Berlin, apparently against the wishes of the Nazis. Heading the other two original divisions—human heredity and eugenics—were Verschuier and Muckermann, respectively. Muckermann's connections to influential Catholic industrialists were in no small measure responsible for part of the institute's financial backing. In 1933 he was dismissed despite Fischer's efforts to retain him, and Lenz took over as director of the eugenics division. He remained at his post until 1945 while simultaneously holding a position as professor of eugenics in the faculty of medicine of the University of Berlin. Fischer managed to retain Verschuier as head of the division of human heredity until 1935, despite Nazi suspicions that "he could not be integrated" into the new order because of his "liberal" outlook.¹¹⁵ In that year Verschuier received a position at the University of Frankfurt; he did not return to Berlin until 1942, when he was chosen director of the entire institute upon Fischer's retirement.

Owing to the willful destruction of documents toward the end of World War II, it is impossible to detail the services and research activities of the institute with any degree of certainty.¹¹⁶ The surviving documents, as well as the publications of institute workers for the years 1927–1945, suggest that their research activities did not change fundamentally after 1933, although admittedly this evidence is unlikely to tell the entire story. In the divisions of human heredity and eugenics the focus of investigation during the Third Reich did not seem to reflect an obsession with either Aryan supremacy or Jewish inferiority. Verschuier and those who came to work under him studied the inheritance of "normal" morphological and physiological traits as well as the inheritance of disease, intelligence, and behavior. Like Rüdin, Verschuier engaged in twin studies. In the eugenics division, the primary concern both before and after 1933 seems to have been differential birthrates of various social groups. In 1930, for example, Muckermann examined the differential birthrates of 3,947 families of German university professors; six years later Ilse Schmidt, a researcher in the eugenics division, studied the relationship between intelligence and urbanization. Another area under investigation in the eugenics division was radiation genetics. In Fischer's anthropological division the primary focus both before and after 1933 was the genetic analysis of racial crossing. At least according to a later report by Verschuier, virtually every crossing was studied except that between Jews and "Aryans."¹¹⁷

While those race hygienists holding research positions seem to have continued with "business as usual" after 1933, their institutional affiliation did obligate

¹¹⁵ Jürgen Kroll, *Zur Entstehung und Institutionalisierung einer naturwissenschaftlichen und sozialpolitischen Bewegung: Die Entwicklung der Eugenik/Rassenhygiene bis zum Jahre 1933*, sozialwiss. Diss., Tübingen, 1983 (Tübingen: privately printed), p. 161; Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), p. 78.

¹¹⁶ Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft*, pp. 24–25.

¹¹⁷ Otto Freiherr von Verschuier, "Das ehemalige Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie, menschliche Erblehre und Eugenik," *Zeitschrift für morphologische Anthropologie*, 1964, 55:127–174, on pp. 160–161, 156–158, 129–136, 159.

them, willingly or unwillingly, to serve the needs of Nazi racial policy. Both institutes, especially the one in Berlin, were expected to aid the government in its effort to improve the German race. What this meant in practice, as revealed in several memos and reports, is that members of the institutes were called upon to teach eugenics, genetics, and anthropology courses to state-employed physicians and SS doctors; to help carry out the sterilization law by providing *Gutachten* (expert testimony) in cases coming before the genetic health courts; and to compose racial testimonials and genealogies for the ministry of interior after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws. By 1935, for example, over 1,100 physicians had already taken one of the above-mentioned courses; between 50 and 185 doctors participated in a year-long continuation course in "genetic and racial care."¹¹⁸ The writing of *Gutachten* for the genetic health courts was considered so important that Minister of Interior Frick secured money for a total of five assistants for Fischer, Verschuer, and Rüdin just to help them handle the large case load. Verschuer and Fischer also became members of the Berlin genetic health court and the Berlin supreme genetic health court, respectively. The composition of racial genealogies seems to have been somewhat more unpleasant and time-consuming for the particular eugenicists involved.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, insofar as Germany's race hygienists were willing to deliver a verdict on the "racial ancestry" of individuals, they were, at least after 1941, indirectly involved in sending Jews to their death.

Responsibility and Legacy

The eugenicists' willingness to participate in the construction of such racial genealogies raises the question of their connection to other criminal Nazi racial policies. A case in point is the sterilization of the "Rhineland bastards"—the children of German mothers and French African occupation troops stationed in the Rhineland after World War I. Lenz and Rüdin were indeed asked, as members of the Expert Committee for Population and Racial Policy, to give their opinion on what should be done with these children. Interestingly, neither Lenz nor Rüdin was in favor of mandatory sterilization, although their "solutions" to the problem were hardly commendable: Lenz suggested that the children be "exported," while Rüdin opted for their "voluntary" sterilization on pain of deportation. The actual decision to proceed with the forced sterilization of these children was made in 1937 in the Reich Chancellery without further consultation with the eugenicists. Only Fischer and Verschuer were even indirectly involved in this action; both were called upon to write the requisite anthropological testimonials needed to document the children's racial ancestry prior to sterilization.¹²⁰ Whether they willingly prepared the genealogies that resulted in the sterilization of 385 "colored" children remains unknown.

German eugenicists also bore at most only indirect responsibility for the "euthanasia action." Officially, about 100,000 so-called useless eaters (mentally ill

¹¹⁸ Tätigkeitsbericht von Anfang Juli 1933 bis 1. April 1935. In Archiv der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, West Berlin, folio 2401, doc. no. 49.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, doc. no. 49b; and Müller Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), p. 39.

¹²⁰ Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft*, pp. 34–35; and Reiner Pommerin, *Sterilizierung der Rhinelandbastarde: Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit 1918–1937* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1979), pp. 75, 78.

and retarded patients) were exterminated in Germany between 1939 and 1941. However, recent evidence has demonstrated that the killings began much earlier, did not end until the end of the war, and were not limited to German victims: "useless eaters" in Poland and the Soviet Union, many of them Jews, were also exterminated under the program. Since the history of the destruction of "lives not worth living" is well documented elsewhere, it is not necessary to give a full account of it here.¹²¹ Suffice it to say that "euthanasia" was never considered a race hygiene measure by any eugenicist. Only Lenz was in any way involved in an official committee designed to formulate a law permitting "euthanasia"—a law that apparently never saw the light of day since the action remained officially secret.¹²² Despite the fact that "euthanasia" was never seen as a eugenics measure, the action was known and at least half-heartedly accepted by most active race hygiene practitioners; it was, after all, the logical outgrowth of the cost-benefit analysis at the heart of race hygiene. Nonetheless, Germany's race hygiene practitioners were neither in charge of the program nor directly involved in sending any individuals to their deaths.

Perhaps the most commonly held assumption about German eugenics and its practitioners is that they are intricately bound to the activities of the death camps, where a large percentage of Europe's Jewish and gypsy populations were exterminated. While there are ideological links between race hygiene and the destruction of unwanted "racial groups," it would be inaccurate to assume that individual German eugenicists or German race hygiene as a whole was directly responsible for the Holocaust.

Although those particular eugenicists most active during the Nazi period were undeniably anti-Semitic, their socially acceptable brand of anti-Semitism was typical of the German conservative academic mandarins as a whole: these were not people who wanted to see Jews gassed. Lenz provides a typical case in point. During the Weimar years he refused to change his allegedly "objective" position regarding Jews just to please Germany's anti-Semitic movement. He bemoaned the fact that so much energy was being converted into such a "useless racket." Not surprisingly, he never seemed to recognize his own anti-Semitic prejudices and hence continued to talk about anti-Semites as if they were a group to which he in no way belonged. During the Nazi period, however, Lenz was willing to support a somewhat more blatant anti-Semitic position, as evidenced in the change in his description of the Jews between the third edition of the first volume of the *Grundriß* (1927) and the fourth edition of the same volume (1936).¹²³

However, even after 1933, when it would have been politically expedient, the writings of Lenz and other eugenicists did not emphasize anti-Semitism. Had they been rabid anti-Semites they could have published such views in any number of journals both before and after 1933. Moreover, none of the "professional eugenicists" were involved in any piece of anti-Semitic legislation. Even assuming that many of the eugenicists actually welcomed "early measures" designed to separate and isolate the Jews—an assumption that is by no means firmly established—they had little real influence over any piece of Nazi legisla-

¹²¹ For the best and most exhaustive account of this tragic episode see Ernst Klee, *"Euthanasie" im NS-Staat. Die "Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens"* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983).

¹²² Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), p. 18.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

tion, let alone legislation relating to the Jews. The Nuremberg Laws forbidding marriages or extramarital relations between Jews and Aryans were composed without the aid of a single professional race hygienist. Finally, the eugenicists did not take part in the infamous Wannsee Conference of 1942, where plans for the "final solution to the Jewish question" were confirmed by Heydrich and other leading Nazi officials.

Absolving the eugenicists of any *direct* responsibility for the "final solution" is, of course, not to excuse or condone their behavior and actions throughout the Nazi period. Ultimately it was not their anti-Semitism that linked them, however indirectly, to the death camps: in terms of any indirect personal responsibility for the Holocaust, their crimes, like those of large sections of the German population, were largely crimes of omission. By 1933 race hygiene had become an established discipline in Germany, and eugenicists had a vested interest in the continued funding of the field and the institutes to which they belonged. When asked in an interview why Ernst Rüdin wrote an article praising the Nazis, his daughter Edith replied, "He would have sold himself to the devil in order to obtain money for his institute and his research." The only way Germany's eugenicists could preserve their positions and secure financial backing for their work was by cooperating with Nazi officials. This often meant paying lip service to Nazi programs and joining the Party—the latter as evidence of loyalty to the regime. Lenz, Fischer, Verschuer, and Rüdin all became Party members, but only after 1937.¹²⁴

But perhaps more important, they expected that their dream of a meritocratic eugenics-based society would be realized in the Third Reich. A statement made by Lenz in 1931 makes it obvious that he welcomed the National Socialists as the only political party willing to take the "eugenics outlook" seriously.¹²⁵ Frustrated by the lack of progress in realizing eugenic ideas during the Weimar years, eugenicists active during the Nazi period expected their plans to be realized under Hitler. Even after it became clear to them that Hitler's ideas of race hygiene were not precisely the same as their own, and even after they realized that they were unlikely to be able to exercise any kind of "positive" or moderating influence on Nazi racial policy, Germany's eugenicists showed few qualms about their positions as scientific legitimizers of the kind of racism that sent millions to their deaths. Throughout the Third Reich they simply continued to insist that *their* understanding of eugenics was the scientific one, while attempting to resist taking a rabid anti-Semitic line whenever possible. They sought to hide behind the cloak of "objective science." Fischer, for example, could not be persuaded to say that *all* Jews were inferior. Science, he undoubtedly felt, would not allow such a statement. Hence, for Fischer, Jews were not necessarily always inferior; they were merely "different." Yet the eugenicists' attempt to preserve their moral and scientific integrity did not prevent them from using material shipped back from the death camps to the Berlin institute to further their own research. If the evidence presented by Benno Müller-Hill is accurate, blood samples and organs extracted from twins and dwarfs were transported from Auschwitz to the Berlin institute so that researchers could advance scientific knowledge.¹²⁶ Their

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 131 (quotation), 79, 125, and 133.

¹²⁵ Lenz, "Die Stellung des Nationalsozialismus zur Rassenhygiene" (cit. n. 71), pp. 300–308.

¹²⁶ Müller-Hill, *Tödliche Wissenschaft* (cit. n. 2), pp. 78, 73–74.

crime was not so much their specific theories or their “respectable” anti-Semitism, but their willingness to continue with their work as though it were totally unrelated to the bestialities carried out by their masters in the name of race hygiene.

What, then—if anything—is the legacy of pre-1933 eugenics for the extermination programs of the Third Reich? Can one rightfully speak of an ideological connection between the kind of eugenics articulated by relative nonracists such as Schallmayer, Muckermann, and Grotjahn and the atrocities carried out in the name of race hygiene by Nazi officials? Throughout its history, race hygiene was a strategy that aimed at boosting national efficiency through the rational management of population. Whereas before the Third Reich “fitness” had generally been understood in purely meritocratic terms, without emphasizing race, after 1933 race and productivity became the two criteria defining it. It is not difficult to see the usefulness of race hygiene as a means of creating a stronger Nazi *völkisch* state. From the standpoint of efficiency, a racial policy such as the “euthanasia” program—the destruction of “unproductive lives”—is not without its logic, morally perverse though that logic is.

But what about the Holocaust? Although the extermination of millions of European Jews cannot really be viewed as a measure designed to boost national efficiency, the designation of the Jews as an unfit, surplus, and disposable group is not unrelated to the emphasis implicit in German race hygiene regarding “valuable” and “valueless” people. For the eugenicists, human beings were in some sense variables—objects easily managed or manipulated for some abstract “good.” In one of humankind’s most barbaric acts to date, there is more than a hint of where the desire to be rid of a “valueless” population can lead. Thus, whatever the intentions of even relatively nonracist eugenicists before 1933, the very logic of eugenics—the rational management of population for some “higher end”—was a logic readily amenable to other, far more sinister projects than those envisaged by Schallmayer, Muckermann, and Grotjahn. Hence, in the end, it is the *logic* of eugenics, far more than its racism, that proved the most unfortunate legacy of the German race hygiene movement for the Third Reich.